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REAL AND IMAGINARY GOLF-COURSES :

SYSTEMS OF ORDER IN

MALCOLM LOWRY'S

UNDER THE VOLCANO

by

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A thesis submitted for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy to the  
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### SUMMARY

Frequently employing the device of close textual analysis, this thesis attempts to chart, and subsequently examine, some of the ordering systems which would appear to inform, in a variety of ways, Malcolm Lowry's novel Under the Volcano. The introduction sets out to try and explain why the novel can be regarded, to some extent at least, as an 'open' text, and further suggests that the reader himself is posited by Lowry as an implied organising consciousness. Dividing the analysis into the fields of external, symbolic and motival areas of potential order, the thesis then proceeds to further examine smaller units of Lowry's processes.

Although generally acknowledged as a dense or complex text, Under the Volcano has infrequently been subjected to rigorous textual analysis and, as such, the thesis charts some large new areas which have so far only remained peripheral to Lowry studies, always seeking to draw attention to how any given system corresponds to itself, as well as to other related areas of reference. Mythic, literary, cabballistical, and other relevant material is introduced if it assists in defining any specific aspect of a potential ordering system. The thesis concludes that Under the Volcano seeks to draw attention to its own obsession with pattern and that one of Lowry's purposes is to enable his reader to imaginatively participate in the ordering and re-ordering of the novel's basic materials.

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### ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout this thesis all references to Under the Volcano are to the Penguin edition, first published in Harmondsworth in 1962 and subsequently reprinted in '63, '66, '68, '69, '72, '73, '74, '76, '77, '79 and '81. The page numbers of the Penguin edition are set in parentheses and immediately succeed the quotation, for example, 'Two mountain chains traverse the republic'(9).

References in the study to Lowry's 'letter to Cape' or 'letter to his publisher' invariably allude to Lowry's famous defence of Under the Volcano written in 1946 and included in Selected Letters (London, 1967), pp.57-88.

Any reference to either Dark as the Grave or Hear Us O Lord are to Lowry's posthumously published fictions: rather verbosely titled Dark as the Grave Wherein my Friend is Laid and Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place, and published by Jonathan Cape in London in 1969.

INTRODUCTION

Sterne's conception of a literary text is that it is something like an arena in which reader and author participate in a game of the imagination.

Iser, The Implied Reader

Towards the close of Chapter Three of Under the Volcano,  
Geoffrey Firmin (the Consul, as he is known), having steadied his

hand with strategic glass of Johnny Walker Whisky, decides to hide both glass and bottle in a cupboard; opening the door he discovers 'two old golf balls'(96-97) there and says: 'Play with me I can still carry the eighth green in three'(97). As there is nobody else present when the Consul delivers the above sentence we may wonder precisely whom the statement is intended to address? For the purpose of my subsequent argument I would like to suggest that the words are directed at the reader of Lowry's novel; that he is being asked to participate in a sort of game of golf with, or rather across, the text.<sup>1</sup>

The premise behind the title of this thesis is as follows: Lowry's novel Under the Volcano can be regarded as a sort of golf-course across which each reader (golfer) plays a game of the imagination.<sup>2</sup> The text (the course) never changes yet each individual reader's (player's) round (response) is somewhat different, although all readers (golfers) follow an identical lay-out (see below). Moreover, one could also say that the more one plays a golf-course the better player of it one is likely to become; a similar precept applies to reading Under the Volcano, which Lowry himself said 'could be read an indefinite number of times and still not have yielded all its meanings or its drama or its poetry',<sup>3</sup> for the more one reads it the better 'reader' one is likely to become.

In his study of the processes which become involved, in an 'active' way, in the reading of fiction, The Implied Reader. Wolfgang Iser writes that 'the potential text is infinitely richer than any of its individual realisations'.<sup>4</sup> In terms of Under the Volcano, the statement would appear especially true, for Lowry's novel

consistently seeks to draw attention to the range of material it harbours - mythical, historical, anthropological, geographical, scientific, etc. (see Encyclopedic Narrative). However, Under the Volcano is also made an infinitely rich text by means of the inner harmonies it is able to generate, in that most things, if not everything, seem connected or linked in some way (the thesis largely attempts to demonstrate in 'what' way) to everything else. Writing of Joyce, Margaret Solomon says: 'In Ulysses, meaning is not discovered, it is produced by resonances which become producers of other resonances',<sup>5</sup> and the production of such 'resonances' constitutes a dynamic intercourse between reader and text in both Joyce's novel as well as in Lowry's.

Under the Volcano's inherently cyclical or 'spatial' design (see Wheels) further emphasises its desire to be considered not as a straightforwardly linear narrative, but rather as a 'decentred' work emanating a range of multifarious possibilities at the same time. Defining an aspect of the process of reading, Iser says:

Whatever we have read sinks into our memory and is foreshortened. It may later be evoked again and set against a different background with the result that the reader is enabled to develop ~~hitherto~~ unforeseeable connections... The new background brings to light new aspects of what he had committed to memory; conversely, these, in turn, shed their light on the new background, thus arousing more complex anticipations. Thus, the reader, in establishing these interrelations between past, present and future, actually causes the text to reveal its potential multiplicity of connections. These connections are the product of the reader's mind working on the raw material of the text, though they are not the text itself - for this consists just of sentences, statements, information, etc. °

Again Iser's definition of the archetypal text fits quite well into our definition of Under the Volcano as a golf-course, the golf played on it in fact providing the connections across the raw material of its 'terrain'. In point of fact if we return to the brief quotations with which this introduction commenced then we can perhaps demonstrate how, in Lowry's text, the reader is invited, to paraphrase Iser's words, to establish interrelations between past and present thus actually 'causing' the text to reveal some of its implicit connections. If we 'remember' - the Consul has hidden his Johnny Walker bottle and then said 'I can still carry the eighth green in three'(97), the little incident demanding to be compared or 'linked' to Jacques' remembrances of the Leasowe links in Chapter One where the eighth fairway of the course is described, with its Hell Bunker yawning to snap up 'the third shot of a golfer like Geoffrey'(26). This disparity between the Consul's belief that he can carry the bunker in three and Jacques' information that Firmin's third shot usually found its way into the bunker becomes ironically fulfilled at the end of the novel when the Consul finds himself in the ravine or bunker he believed he could 'carry'. Furthermore, one evening after leaving the course Geoffrey had entered a bar for the first time of his own initiative and ordered 'Johnny Walkers all round'(27).

Lowry includes some cinematic material and references into Under the Volcano and the cinema probably offers an analogous art form to the manner in which Lowry's novel is constructed. In film, awareness is nearly always drawn inwards to the frame itself and the constituent elements with which it is formed. In looking at a film's frame our eyes become individually drawn towards a

personal selection of our own favourite images. The Volcano is a text which would seem to lend itself to the creation of mental images in their thousands, yet that is not all it does for, by increasingly returning to the same or similar myths, symbols, motifs, phrases, words, etc. as already encountered before, it also returns, although far less 'specifically' than in film, where the image always inhabits an identical visual constant, to the same mental images 'projected' and 'held in focus' by the mind of the reader. By now though, in the way in which we are asked to construct and refurbish our own homogenous world of self-gathered material, we are also constructing, forming or building our own levels and thus, in a way, 'writing' our own novel. Roland Barthes implies the presence of an unlimited choice in such an operation when he writes: 'all images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a "floating chain" of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others'.<sup>7</sup> Although I would certainly not like to deny the possibilities and permutations, an example being the Consul's/Jacques' golf correspondence outlined above, which texts like Under the Volcano, and Ulysses for that matter,<sup>8</sup> are capable of generating (it indeed forms a general precept which constitutes the 'modus operandi' behind much of the research of this thesis), I would perhaps, nonetheless, like to question to exactly what extent the reader is given a free hand, as it were? As quoted above Barthes says of the text's 'images' that the reader is able to choose some and ignore others. Lowry would already seem to restrict our choice by ignoring some possibilities himself. Certainly though, to some extent, the process of free selection of sorts entails that the text is no longer a transparent medium but that it has its own 'textual' life and logic which may be



independent from, or at least different to the fiction it depicts set, in Under the Volcano's case, in the Mexican town of Quahnahuac; or, in Ulysses's case, in Dublin. Stephen Heath terms such a change of emphasis, or at least the awareness of a dual emphasis, a feature of much twentieth-century writing, as constituting a transformation from the 'innocence of realism' to a concentration on 'the practice of writing'.<sup>9</sup> Iser again says: 'The reader is virtually free to choose his own direction, but he will not be able to work his way through every possible perspective, for the number of these is far beyond the capacity of any one man's naturally selective perception'.<sup>10</sup> Admittedly, the number of permutations ~~are~~ perhaps infinite; the reader virtually free to choose his own direction; yet, it would seem, that he still has to operate within some specific parameters created by the writer.

The sub-title, or rather the working title, of this thesis is 'Systems of Order in Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano' - to return to my golf metaphor: although there are indeed virtually any number of potential shots to be played (connections to be made) across the terrain of the course (text) the player (reader) must nonetheless pursue his game (reading) in a fairly set manner by adhering to the 'rules of the game'; by following the course in the prescribed way; by attempting to get round without making himself 'out of bounds'. Such laws must be obeyed by both golfer and critic alike; they constitute the foundations upon which his 'play' is based. By ordering his material to the extent to which he does (see below), Lowry already sharply outlines the tees and

greens of his course for us, forever pointing us in the right direction. When Under the Volcano was initially rejected by Jonathan Cape's reader, and then prepared to be accepted only if substantial cuts and/or alterations were made, Lowry composed a famous defence of his novel in which he writes the following: 'Using the word reader in the more general sense, I suggest that whether or not the Volcano as it is seems tedious at the beginning depends somewhat on the reader's state of mind and how prepared he is to grapple with the form of the book';<sup>11</sup> slightly later he writes that to make any changes which 'radically alter the form' would be to 'undermin[e] the foundations of the book, the basic structure'.<sup>12</sup> (Lowry was not keen to see his championship golf-course hacked down or shortened simply for the benefit of inadequate 'players'.) Enlarging somewhat on Lowry's own definition of structure, one could claim that Under the Volcano is a novel which is riddled with a variety of different sorts of structure (mythic, symbolic, verbal, etc.) and that these structures provide general guide-lines (fairways) for each reader (golfer) to pursue, showing the difference at least between the cut grass and the rough; again, attempting to assist play. Although implicitly 'open', Lowry's text, I believe, nonetheless invites us to reach conclusions (holes).

What conclusions then are to be obtained from a reading of Under the Volcano? Lowry too was fond of metaphorically discussing the structure of his novel; in his letter to Cape he writes: 'That which may seem inorganic in itself might prove right in terms of the whole churriqueresque structure I conceived and which I hope may begin soon to loom out of the fog for you like Borda's horrible-beautiful cathedral in Taxco'.<sup>13</sup> The conclusions to which Lowry

would seem to wish to draw our attention are conclusions about structure, form, pattern, etc.; he constantly wishes us to make our leaps on his text in terms of realisation that that which seemed inorganic in itself might prove right in terms of the whole. Elsewhere in his letter to Cape, Lowry writes to his publisher that he claims his novel to be 'a work of art somewhat different from the one you suspected it was';<sup>14</sup> he concentrates on drawing the reader's attention towards hidden levels of order which may not at first be apparent. Writing of Ulysses, Fritz Senn makes the point that 'Few works of literature, let alone novels, can have appeared more chaotic and less patterned than Ulysses did to its first unprepared readers. We now see it as the most multiply patterned and elaborately devised prose work ever.'<sup>15</sup> By 1946, a quarter of a century on from the publication of Joyce's novel, it appears that 'readers' were still unprepared to grapple with a multiply-patterned and elaborately devised prose work, for Under the Volcano was also implicitly accused of appearing chaotic. If anything, Lowry forever seeks to deny the 'chaos' which may seem to riddle his novel by forever suggesting to the reader the multiply-patterned layers which lie beneath the mere surface of his text.

Iser writes: 'the literary work has two poles which we might call the artistic and the esthetic; the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the esthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader'.<sup>16</sup> Although Iser's point is itself quite apt, it can perhaps be manipulated in terms of what I believe Lowry wishes his readers' response to Under the Volcano to be: he seems to invite aesthetic (i.e. reader) participation by means of demanding the 'artistic' (by this I mean any underlying systems

of order) aspect to be constantly discovered and recognized.

Writing of Borges, Tony Tanner says that there is a constant 'pattern of the game'<sup>17</sup> in his work and the same statement could be made of Under the Volcano, yet in that Lowry's novel forever invites imaginative (though controlled) play from its readers one could also say that, fundamentally, it is the game of the pattern which is demanded.

Whether or not my own imaginative play on the real golf-course of Lowry's text always achieves the maximum pattern in the least number of strokes; or, indeed, whether the full pattern can ever become minimally isolated, are perhaps questions I may leave to my conclusion to try and answer.

This thesis attempts to demonstrate some of Lowry's systems of order in action. To do so it has to schematize the novel, breaking its themes down into separate entities. This was not always easy to perform for, as Lowry writes in his letter to Cape, 'they are all involved with each other and their fusion is the book.'<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, for the purposes of some kind of sectioning of the material, the thesis falls into three parts and deals, firstly, with three aspects of 'external' order (by this I mean ordering systems which reside outside the text but which become assimilated into the text to provide it with a ready-made scaffolding or framework); secondly, with the order provided by Lowry's symbols; and thirdly, by the ordering processes which become made possible by the recurrence of motifs which generate patterns of association in the reader's mind. Already a glance at my table of contents compared with this brief description of

what each section of the work deals with may raise some questions. Surely the Tarot, dealt with in Part One as an external system, inherently deals with 'symbolic' properties? Or surely a 'motif' is also implicitly a symbol, especially if we believe Northrop Frye when he writes: 'A word, a phrase, or an image used with some kind of special reference ... are all symbols when they are distinguishable elements in literary criticism'?<sup>19</sup> I can really make no excuses for my possible muddling together of various parts of my thesis into various other parts except to say that my initial categorisation is simply a 'way of seeing' and that the total effect produced by all sections in unison constitutes what is to be seen.

# INTRODUCTION - NOTES

1. - The idea that his text is to be perhaps regarded as a sort of game may be obliquely introduced or suggested by Lowry at the outset of Under the Volcano in that, especially during the opening couple of pages of the novel, he alludes to a variety of actual sports and games: firstly, he tells us that Quahnahuac 'boasts a golf-course'(9); secondly, he mentions the Casino and the possibility of dicing for drinks; thirdly, he refers to jai-alai (a Mexican game somewhat similar to squash) and tennis courts; fourthly, he informs us that his two characters, Vigil and Laruelle, have 'been playing tennis, followed by billiards'(10); fifthly, he chronicles the fact that 'two young Americans ... had started a belated game of ping-pong'(11).
2. - It may be worth noting that Lowry himself was a keen golfer and possessed considerable ability in the sport.
3. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters (London, 1967), p.88.
4. - Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett (Baltimore, Maryland, 1974), p.280.
5. - Margaret Solomon, 'Character as Linguistic Mode: a new look at Streams-of-Consciousness in Ulysses', in Ulysses: Cinquante Ans Après, edited by Louis Bonnerot (Paris, 1974), p.128.
6. - Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader, p.268.
7. - Roland Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', Image-Music-Text, essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath (London, 1977), pp.38-39.
8. - Many of the ideas expressed in this introduction, and in fact many of the working methods employed throughout the thesis in general, partially derive from a reading of Joyce criticism - see Bibliography. Brook Thomas, for example, suggests that with Ulysses 'the act of reading turns the reader into an accomplice of the author, helping him to create a text whose meanings are inexhaustible'. See Brook Thomas, 'Not a Reading of, but the Act of Reading Ulysses', James Joyce Quarterly, Vol.16, Nos.1/2 (The University of Tulsa, Fall '78/Winter '79), p.82.
9. - Stephen Heath, The Nouveau Roman: A Study in the Practice of Writing (London, 1972), p.22.
10. - Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader, p.231.

11. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.58.
12. - ibid., pp.58-59.
13. - ibid., p.61.
14. - ibid., p.66.
15. - Fritz Senn, 'James Joyce and his Orders', A Starchamber Quiry : A James Joyce Centennial Volume, 1882-1982.  
edited by E.L. Epstein (London and New York, 1982), p.45.
16. - Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader, p.274.
17. - Tony Tanner, City of Words: A Study of American Fiction in the Mid-Twentieth Century (London, 1971), p.48.
18. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.86.
19. - Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays  
(Princeton, New Jersey, 1957), p.71.

PART ONE : EXTERNAL SYSTEMS OF ORDER

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ENCYCLOPEDIA NARRATIVE

The Glass Mountain twinkled rose and white in in the hot sun, the elf king and his queen made a royal progress every noon with a splendid retinue of dwarves and sprites, handing out cakes, ices and candies. At each intersection or square, bands played - marches, folk-dances, hot jazz, Hugo Wolf. Children went streaming like confetti. At the drinking fountains, where soda water sparkled deep inside the fanged mouths of dragons, of wild lions and tigers, the queues of children waited, each for his moment of danger, leaning halfway into the shadow, into the smell of wet cement and old water, into the mouth of the beast, to drink. In the sky, the tall ferris wheel spun. From Peenemunde they had come 280 kilometers, which was to be, coincidentally, the operational range of the A4.

Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow.

Ostensibly, Lowry began work on what was to become his novel Under the Volcano in Mexico in the summer of 1936; the book

was eventually published in both England and America in 1947.

In terms of Lowry's fairly brief lifespan, Under the Volcano came to dominate virtually half of his entire writing career: he began it at the age of twenty-seven as a relatively young man, whilst by the time it appeared he had just less than a decade left to live. Admittedly, these bare facts, taken in isolation, would not appear to tell us a great deal about Lowry's struggle with the Volcano except perhaps to suggest that he was an extremely 'slow' or 'lazy' writer, yet such assumptions are far from the truth.

The novel began life as a much shorter work of fiction, a story which became a short novella (one thinks of Joyce's Ulysses which he originally conceived as just another story for Dubliners), yet underwent four major, and innumerable minor, revisions during its ten year gestation. The testimony of Margerie Lowry, and, indeed, the mass of 'volcanic' manuscripts, now deposited in the Special Collections Division of the University of British Columbia, attest in providing us with some notion of Lowry's working methods: he would frequently draft a chapter, paragraph or even single sentence many times, returning to it months or even years later in order to select and revise. (In his letter to Jonathan Cape, he frequently outlines, at the start of his own analysis of a chapter, its period of composition, for example, of Chapter Ten he says: 'This was first written in '36-'37 and rewritten at various periods up to 1943.

This final version was written after my fire, in the summer and fall of 1944'.)<sup>1</sup> Moreover, his mode of revision, in so far as he can be said to have had one, did not consist of a refining or paring down of existing material, but rather in terms of continual expansion and elaboration.

It may seem facetious to make general comparisons with other writers yet these may broadly assist in establishing the encyclopedic nature of Lowry's text. As stated Lowry was thirty-eight by the time the Volcano was published; it became the final, as well as only the second, published book of his lifetime. If one considers the number of novels a Dickens, Hardy, James, Balzac or Lawrence had written by the age of thirty-eight direct comparisons with Lowry's slim output must needs lead us towards different authors; those producing a mere handful or indeed perhaps even only one considerable work - Gogol, Flaubert, Joyce spring immediately to mind, as indeed do Cervantes and Sterne, as well as the epic poets: Homer, Virgil, Dante. At the conclusion of his study of the Volcano Markson writes:

Probably there are greater novels in the language - whatever precisely that notion means - and undeniably there are any number of novelists whose oeuvre displaces more weight. But is any single fictional achievement - and I include Ulysses in the question - quite so fecund in evocation, so diverse in amplification? Indeed my ultimate suspicion is that Under the Volcano should not be read as we read other fictions at all. It is a poem, rather, and a poem in kind with several of its grandest models. I mean with the Aeneid, the Divine Comedy, with Goethe's Faust - each of which, for all the apparatus criticus of centuries, remains ever newly open to [some] sort of enriching interpretation and delight. <sup>2</sup>

Why then should the Volcano be 'so diverse in amplification' as to allow Markson his grandiose comparisons? One reason is surely its apparent encyclopedic scope; what Ronald Binns terms the 'sheer density of historical, geographical, anthropological and literary reference in the novel'.<sup>3</sup> This all-embracing density allows for highly meshed patterns to emerge

rather as in an elaborately wrought poem, but a poem, in both senses of the word, of 'epic' proportions.

Lowry's novel certainly contains a wealth of literary allusion, a fraction of which will be examined 'per se' in the course of this study, some of which will naturally surface 're' the examination of other topics. Suffice to say here then, by way of introduction, that of the four main protagonists, three - the Consul, Hugh and Laruelle - all appear exceptionally well-read. Hugh brings a mass of sea and 'adventure' literature to bear on his reminiscences - Jack London, Melville, Conrad, Hemingway are all frequently invoked - and these authors assist in establishing a 'role' for him on the fateful Day of the Dead, for example, a Hemingway-esque connection colours both his ambulance work in the Spanish Civil War (106) as well as his bull-riding escapade at the Arena Tomalin. The Consul's personal library contains 'numerous cabbalistic and alchemical books'(178) as well as a 'heterogeneous collection'(178) including Gogol, Blake, Tolstoy, Spinoza, Shakespeare, etc.; moreover, he is himself in the process of compiling 'sensational new data on Atlantis'(91) for his own book on Secret Knowledge. Laruelle is made the guardian of two of the Volcano's most important sub-texts: the plays, Marlowe's Doctor Faustus (borrowed from the Consul) and 'Jean Cocteau's La Machine Infernale'(212). In Chapter Seven, the Consul and Hugh have a lengthy conversation concerning Shelley which commences with mention of Laruelle's 'film ... made out of Alastor'(206) and which leads onto the Consul's personal musings on Prometheus Unbound, whilst a more vociferous interchange between the brothers in Chapter Ten originates by means of reference, firstly to Matthew Arnold(306)

and later to Tolstoy: 'Didn't Katamusev or whoever he was ...'(313).

As with Ulysses, rarely does a page of Under the Volcano go by without either mention of an author's name or the invocation of a direct or manipulated quotation.<sup>4</sup> Frequently, again as with Ulysses, the individual reader brings his own previous reading to bear on the text and is thus often to be tempted into making his own series of literary connections. Lowry himself briefly outlines this potential game to be played with his novel for us in terms of a 'correspondence, maybe, as Geoff liked to put it, between the subnormal world and the abnormally suspicious. How the Consul had delighted in the absurd game too: sortes Shakespeareanae'(40). Two examples of partial or potential connections which personally spring to mind from two consecutive pages of Chapter One are Laruelle's remembrance of seeing 'the twin spires of Chartres'(18) rising from out of the surrounding wheatfields - Marcel in Swann's Way? - and his subsequent reference to the mountains containing 'secret mines of silver'(19) - Nostromo perhaps?

Mendelson comments that 'Each encyclopedic narrative is an encyclopedia of Literary styles',<sup>5</sup> and Under the Volcano too is not without its share of stylistic borrowings and parodies. Hugh's sea interlude has all the ingredients of a good 'yarn' and bears much resemblance to Conrad, especially 'Youth'; Yvonne's recollections of her Hollywood years are liberally interspersed with film magazine reportage: 'The Honolulu Hellion who at twelve was a war-whooping tomboy, crazy about baseball, disobeying everyone but her adored Dad, who she called 'The Boss-Boss', became at fourteen a child actress, and at fifteen, leading lady

to Bill Hodson'(263): the Consul's own hallucinogenic literary talents are given vent in his long and agonising unsent letter and his 'almost indecipherable' (331) attempt at Symbolist poetry.

Sundry postcards and telegrams contribute further varied extraneous 'written' material, as do boxing, bull-fighting and cinema advertisements, the 'garden' sign, and bus and rail timetables. The encyclopedic breadth of varying stylistic patterns and constants is also mentally enhanced by the inclusion of excessively 'high' or 'low' styles. Compare, for example, the Consul's 'illuminist dream',<sup>6</sup> as Markson calls it:

Behind them walked the only living thing that shared their pilgrimage, the dog. And by degrees they reached the briny sea. Then, with souls well disciplined they reached the northern region, and beheld with heaven aspiring hearts, the mighty mountain Himavat ... (129)

- a mock synthesis of elements from the Hindu epic the Mahabharata and Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress - with one of the absurd nursery-rhyme songs: Hugh's 'Plingen, plangen' (192) chant or Laruelle's 'wibberlee wobberlee' (26) lyric.

Moreover, the narrative stance becomes remodified with the appearance of each new chapter, seen, as they are, from four different and varying perspectives. The Consul's chronic alcoholism allows for a phantasmagorical, over-embellished 'stream-of-consciousness' technique, Hugh's political stance for some liberal, pseudo-polemical musings, Yvonne's hopes of a northern paradise for an idyllic, simple Walden-esque approach, Laruelle's

recollections for nostalgic reverie. In this way the Volcano shares with other 'encyclopedias' the notion of never possessing a stylistic constant; rather, as is the case with a real encyclopedia, of being 'written' by a host of different people. As with other authors who remorselessly employ shifting interior viewpoint, accompanied and reinforced by literary allusions and borrowings (Joyce again perhaps affords the most apt comparison), Lowry's own style proves virtually impossible to parody: unlike in Dickens, Hardy, James, Lawrence, etc. a surface veneer is never maintained for very long but consistently twisted and contorted as borrowed elements obtrude to disfigure it.

Paintings and the visual arts are given a fair amount of attention also: Riveras's murals in the Cortez Palace are frequently examined and analysed;<sup>7</sup> in the Terminal Cantina El Bosque 'someone had apparently once begun a small mural, aping the Great Mural in the Palace'(229). Laruelle's studio contains 'Orozco charcoal drawings', 'two ruddy Riveras', and the 'terrifying' picture, for the Consul at least, 'Los Borrachones' (202). The Consul's mother painted watercolours 'depicting scenes in Kashmir' (87), the gorges and the mountains in the pictures strategically prefiguring Mexico's ravines and volcanoes. The Consul is a fan of the French primitivist painter 'Douanier' Rousseau, whom he expects 'to come riding out of [the jungle] at any moment on a tiger'(136). (Rousseau's jungle paintings were however only 'imaginary' in that he never left his native France; the Consul's desire to go off and live amongst the Indians is also rendered as merely a dream, vivid though it might be.) In Chapter One, both 'Doré'(11) and 'Blake'(42) are mentioned,<sup>8</sup> whilst another

visionary nineteenth century artist appears by means of a strange simile in Hugh's remembrances in Chapter Six: 'the highest pitched string always first, snapping with sharp gun-like reports, or curious agonized whines, or provocative nocturnal meows, like a nightmare in the soul of George Frederic Watts'(159). Moreover, Yvonne's maiden name is Constable, perhaps suggesting the English landscape painter, and thereby providing an implicit and subtle ironic contrast between the latter's placid rural scenes and the savage, undulating terrain of Mexico.<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, 'obscure sculpturings'(17) hint at the fundamental artistic differences between European civilisation and that of ancient Mexico.

Musically, Lowry covers a very wide area from popular song through to grand opera. Hugh is portrayed as the book's musical performer, who 'if he could not play quite like Django Reinhardt or Eddie Lang on the one hand or, God help him, Frank Crumit on the other, could not help remembering either that he had once enjoyed the reputation of a tremendous talent'(159); he was also a boy song-writer and, after several attempts, 'two numbers of his were accepted'(159) for publication. In Chapter Eleven, Hugh acquires a new guitar and our last picture of him in the novel portrays him standing alone in the thunderstorm as Yvonne is killed nearby 'singing ironically'(334). Elsewhere, Hugh hears on the radio 'the wild controlled abandon' of 'Joe Venuti's violin'(158) and recalls that he went to sea 'on the very day, Friday the thirteenth of May, that Frankie Trumbauer<sup>10</sup> three thousand miles away made his famous record of For No Reason at All in C'(162). Whilst Hugh's musical interests lie essentially in the jazz spectrum, his older half-



brother is perhaps more classically minded.<sup>11</sup> As he lies dying anyway various pieces of suitable accompanying baroque music spring to his still agile mind:

Mozart was it? The Siciliana. Finale of the D minor quartet by Moses. No, it was something funereal, of Gluck's perhaps, from Alceste. Yet there was a Bach-like quality to it. Bach? A clavichord, heard from far away, in England in the seventeenth century. (374)

(Appropriately, by the time Hugh comes to shave the Consul in Chapter Six the radio has stopped broadcasting jazz and is now transmitting 'wild Beethoven'(182) instead.) Yvonne too has occasion to remember various classical pieces which have influenced her life: she is said to have found new faith 'in the music of Ravel'(269) and instantly thinks of Bolero, the most 'obvious' of Ravel's works (and one, apparently, as is often the case, for which he would least like to be remembered), its chords 'snapping and clicking their heels'(269). Perhaps Lowry introduces Bolero into his text in order for it to represent, analogously, the Volcano itself: the work consists of a single 'fateful' theme, which nevertheless, although constant, becomes virtually forgotten as layers of subtle orchestration begin to both reinforce, and paradoxically, almost obliterate it.<sup>12</sup>

Lowry was often eager to discuss his novel in musical contexts. In his letter to Cape he describes it as 'a kind of symphony, or in another way as a kind of opera';<sup>13</sup> he also speaks of recurring imagery in terms of 'chords, struck and resolved'.<sup>14</sup> And admittedly one can detect, or at least speculate upon, some

resemblances to musical forms. If the book is to be regarded as a sort of opera then undoubtedly Chapter One performs an adequate function in acting a kind of lengthy overture to the rest of the work; moreover, in the sense in which many of its constituent elements are left hanging in the air and unspecified it resembles the pure music of an overture devoid of explanatory verbal concomitance. The novel could also be said to resemble a concerto with four soloists playing essentially the same themes except with different variations. Often we are given what Beckoff calls 'enigmatic "contrapunctual" dialogue',<sup>15</sup> as different voices all clamour for attention at the same time, for example, when Weber interrupts Geoffrey and Yvonne in the Bella Vista, or when the Consul and Cervantes interrupt Hugh and Yvonne at the Salon Ofelia. Key musical instruments also echo at various stages throughout the novel; in the Farolito the Consul thinks that:

The evening was filled by odd noises, like those of sleep. The roll of a drum somewhere was a revolution, a cry down the street someone being murdered, brakes grinding far away a soul in pain. The plucked chords of a guitar hung over his head. A bell clanged frantically in the distance. (353)

The drum, guitar and bell are frequently present during the Consul's last fateful day (in a similar way to which tabor, lute and fife are often directed to be present on stage throughout a Yeats play), their initially 'muffled' sounds becoming clearer and more ominous as the action approaches its finale - as he dies, the Consul hears both a bell as well as the 'chords of a guitar' (374), which, on a realistic level, is Hugh's, whilst both Parian and the Pariah dog which follows Firmin down the ravine may derive their names etymolo-

gically from 'paria' the Spanish/Mexican word for drum.

Lowry speaks of the Volcano as 'a kind of opera' and occasionally he finds it useful to refer to Wagnerian operas in that they serve the dual purpose of strengthening both musical and mythical references at the same time. For example, when 'out of the heavens, a swan, transfixed plummet[s] to earth'(75) Lowry possibly alludes to the shot swan which falls to the ground in the first act of Parsifal: not only will the Consul himself be shot and fall, but in a larger sense he can be readily identified with Amfortas, the dying king in Parsifal, whose country reflects his own personal condition and lies in waste and ruin. Immediately after conceiving of his plummeting swan, the Consul thinks of 'a crash of trumpets'(75) announcing the opening of a cantina - at Bayreuth trumpeters appear on the balcony of the opera house to announce that the opera is about to commence by playing themes from the work. In Wagnerian opera themes or 'leitmotifs', as they have been termed, occur again and again and they greatly assist in binding the vast opuses together; by accompanying his swan allusion by the sound of trumpets, Lowry reveals, by means of musical analogy, that the swan theme, whenever it reappears (for example on page 89) will also serve in a purely formal way to help hold his novel together. (Lowry's Volcano has often been compared to Mann's Doktor Faustus published in the same year chiefly because they have a similar central demonic protagonist; however, Under the Volcano also shares with Mann's book certain notions of how a work of prose can draw extensively and profitably from musical forms.)

Mendelson claims: 'An encyclopedic narrative normally ... includes an account of an art outside the realm of written fiction'.<sup>16</sup> Lowry's use of painting and music demonstrates that for his encyclopedia this is also the case; furthermore, he does not simply refer to works of art and music, he assimilates these other arts in such a way that his text frequently aspires to their condition; such elaborate expansion of the possibilities of other art forms is maintained in yet another direction through his use of the cinema.

Considerable work in Lowry studies has already been devoted to the influence of the cinema on Under the Volcano, both in terms of allusion to actual films of the twenties and thirties, as well as, to what might loosely be termed, 'cinematographic techniques'. Suffice to say here therefore that the wealth of reference to the arts of music, literature and painting becomes further extended into the realm of film. The poster for the 'Manos de Orlac' (Hands of Orlac) reappears at various strategic points throughout the novel, and this film is showing at the local cinema both on the 2nd of November, 1938 as well as on the same date a year later; its creaking plot of a pianist with murderer's hands holds a multitude of potential thematic ramifications for Lowry's narrative. Of the four main characters Yvonne had been a Hollywood actress, whilst Laruelle was, and in a sense perhaps still is (see below) a director; Hugh too is frequently portrayed, usually ironically, as a 'leading man' (in Chapter Eleven he literally leads Yvonne through the dark forest) or cinematic hero, perhaps in a Western, as he arrives from Texas in an appropriate cowboy's outfit by means of a cattle truck, and at the Arena Tomalin does his 'bucking bronco' act, or in a

war epic - he hopes to return to fight in Spain. (At the start of Chapter Four, when Hugh makes his first appearance in the novel, Yvonne 'thought for a moment [that he was] Bill Hodson'(99)- it is not until Chapter Nine, however, that we know who Bill Hodson is; he turns out to have been 'the cowboy star whose leading lady she'd been in three pictures when she was fifteen'(263).

On the technical side Lowry may well have been influenced by certain obvious cinematic devices. The novel's first page suggests an overall panning effect, reinforced by a selective 'aerial' shot and then a gradual zooming in and focusing on the two relevant characters or 'actors' (a similar method is returned to in Chapter Two as Yvonne recalls her dawn flight from Acapulco). Elsewhere, extended 'flashbacks', to render scenes from the characters' past lives, are employed, whilst passages such as towards the close of Chapter Six, where Hugh begins to converse with Geoff, whilst still nonetheless pursuing his personal recollections, are suggestive of savage intercutting - his thoughts about the past are rendered in brackets whilst the dialogue continues chronologically as if these interior monologues had not intervened. Most of Chapters Eleven and Twelve, though by no means all, as some critics seem to believe, in that it would take the Consul some time to reach Parian even by the direct route, take place simultaneously (as also incidentally do most of Chapters Four and Five), and we might like to think of them, in retrospect, in terms of a split-screen; and, indeed, if the novel were ever filmed it is difficult to envisage its climax, at least, being effectively portrayed in any other way.

In Chapter One, Laruelle recalls wanting to make 'a modern film version of the Faustus story with some such character as Trotsky for its protagonist'(33). The Consul is, of course, incessantly compared to both Faustus and Faust (see Myth), whilst at the Farolito he is also labelled 'Trotsky'(358), and like the Russian exile he too meets a violent death in Mexico at the hands of political extremists. (The fact that Trotsky was not assassinated until 1940 is an example, not so much of an anachronism, but rather of Lowry's all-encompassing 'prophetic' pre-figurement, a device he also employs elsewhere (see below).) Thus, in a sense, it might be feasible to think of the core of the novel (Chapters Two - Twelve) as Laruelle's 'film' of the Consul's last day, as well as that day itself. During the year which passes since Firmin's murder Jacques remains in Quahnahuac possibly gaining information as to the exact happenings of the Consul's and Yvonne's final fateful day, for example, we are told that he briefly liases with Hugh (14-15), and, 'mentally' at least, projecting this discovered material into a film. The close of the first chapter takes place in a cinema, chronologically the novel's final locale, and the 'backwards revolv[ing] ... luminous wheel'(47) may suggest a rewinding reel; Laruelle, Bustamente and the others in the cinema wait for their film to commence, just as we, as readers, anticipate the unfolding of the remainder of the book; elsewhere, 'slow' or 'quick' wheels hint at film speed depending on the pace of the action (see Wheels).

Finally, just as the Volcano offers its own synthesis of literature, music and the visual arts, so the cinema too could

be said to bring these varying forms of expression under the same roof. Lowry's cinematic sources and devices therefore act as a constant reminder of the all-encompassing nature of the novel's aesthetic concerns; by also taking on the role of film the text analogously reveals its own encyclopedic relationship to the arts in general. (Any prevalent operative overtones perhaps again reveal Lowry's interest in the Wagnerian concept of an all-embracing 'Gesamtkunstwerk'.)

Historically, Lowry also brings a vast variety of allusions and reference into play.<sup>18</sup> In terms of Mexico he has cause to mention: the pre-conquest days; the time of the Aztecs and Mayans; the era of Cortez and Spanish dominance (Cortez's palace stands in the centre of Cuernavaca, the model for Quahnahuac, its ancient name); the nineteenth century, when the Austrian emperor Maximilian and his wife Carlotta lived in the town; the revolution of 1911 in which Huerta (his statue stands in the Square) was a major protagonist; as well as the contemporary political climate of the Cardenas regime, with its model farms, oil crisis and severing of diplomatic relations with many European countries, notably, in terms of the 'Consul', Britain.<sup>19</sup> (Of the four central protagonists it is interesting to note that the Consul is thus really an ex-Consul; similarly, Laruelle is an ex-director, Yvonne an ex-actress, and Hugh is an ex-sailor, ex-songwriter and ex-vigilante.) Outside of Mexico Lowry makes references to Renaissance Spain, to Yvonne's father's colonial experiences in Hawaii (see Mirrorings), to the Consul's escapades in the First World War, as well as to events at that time happening in the Spanish Civil War. Moreover,

Lowry, writing the novel during the Second World War, frequently includes highly accurate prophetic warnings, in that the main action takes place in 1938, to what will happen in the not too distant future, for example, the Consul, in a tirade against Hugh, talking about 'the fate of nations' (311), begins to mention countries which have, and will be, invaded:

Not long ago it was poor little defenceless Ethiopia. Before that, poor little defenceless Flanders. To say nothing of course of the poor little defenceless Belgian Congo. And tomorrow it will be poor little defenceless Latvia. Or Finland. Or Piddledeedee. Or even Russia. Read history. Go back a thousand years. What is the use of interfering with its worthless stupid course? (311)

As Binns observes: 'As a cry of rage made on the 2nd of November 1938 this is historically accurate. A year later Latvia reluctantly agreed to a Soviet military occupation. Finland declined a similar fate and was invaded on 30th November 1939. In June 1941 the U.S.S.R. was in turn invaded by Germany'.<sup>20</sup> Mendelson notes that frequently the action of encyclopedic narratives takes place some years before the time of writing (thus Dante begins Inferno in 1307 setting it in 1300, Joyce starts Ulysses in 1914 setting it in 1904, etc.), and that such a device allows the work 'to maintain a mimetic (or, more precisely, satiric) relation to the world of its readers, while permitting it also to include prophecies that are accurate, having been fulfilled between the time of the action and the time of writing'.<sup>21</sup>

To accompany his all-embracing historical perspective, Lowry makes his novel spread far and wide geographically as well.



Places in all five continents receive a mention and the text literally stretches out from its somewhat limited setting in and around the Mexican town of Quahnahuac. All being exiles of sorts, the four central protagonists also seem to have been (like Lowry himself) inveterate travellers. Laruelle reminisces about his schoolboy visit to the Wirral peninsula (Lowry's birthplace), Yvonne recalls her early life in Hawaii and Hollywood (both of Lowry's wives were American, Margerie worked in Los Angeles at the time he met her), Hugh ponders on his long apprentice voyage to south-east Asia (no doubt based on Lowry's own sea trip as an eighteen year-old to a similar destination, and already written about in Ultramarine), whilst the Consul frequently has cause to remember his childhood in Northern India. Moreover, Yvonne hopes to take the Consul to a peaceful northern paradise in Canada (the mention of 'Vancouver' and 'Burrard Inlet'(125) make it obvious that Lowry had his own waterside shack in mind as the precise location for such a haven; Yvonne gives it the name 'Eridanus'(337), the name Lowry gave to his own dwelling), whilst Hugh hopes, and presumably does, if we concede that novels have potential 'futures', implied but not necessarily described, to set sail for Spain again to assist the dying Loyalist cause. As he conceives of his imminent voyage, Hugh lists no less than twenty different places on both sides of the Atlantic, Lowry providing us with a precise and detailed itinerary verging on the pedantic, yet undoubtedly encyclopedic in both its range as well as the 'scholarly' way it is presented:

And Hugh thought: the s.s. Noemijolea, 6,000 tons, leaving Vera Cruz on the night of 13-14(?) November 1938, with antimony and coffee, bound for Freetown, British West Africa, will proceed,

thither, oddly enough, from Tzucoc on the Yucatan coast, and also in a north-easterly direction: in spite of which she will emerge through the passages named Windward and Crooked into the Atlantic Ocean: where after many days out of sight of land she will make eventually the mountainous landfall of Madeira: whence, avoiding Port Lyantey and carefully keeping her destination in Sierra Leone some 1,800 miles to the south-east, she will pass, with luck, through the straits of Gibraltar. When again, negotiating, it is profoundly to be hoped, Franco's blockade, she will proceed with the utmost caution into the Mediterranean Sea, leaving first Cape de Gata, then Cape de Palos, then Cape de la Nao, well aft: thence, the Pitynsae Isles sighted, she will roll through the Gulf of Valencia and so northwards past Carlos de la Rapita, and the mouth of the Ebro until the rocky Garraf coast looms abaft the beam where finally, still rolling, at Vallcara, twenty miles south of Barcelona, she will discharge her cargo of T.N.T. for the hard-pressed Loyalist armies and probably be~~ss~~ blown to smithereens - (107)

(Admittedly, much of the delight Lowry must have taken in charting this epic voyage so precisely for us is so that its final clause, 'and probably be blown to smithereens', would prove all the more bathetic!)

The novel also includes many languages other than English; Spanish, more specifically Mexican Spanish, dominates, but a smattering of French, a few Latin quotations, and some archaic German is introduced as well, more often than not for comic effect. In Chapter Twelve, when the Fascists taunt the Consul in broken English interspersed with many foreign words and phrases, Lowry hints at a virtual communication breakdown, especially as Firmin too is frequently incoherent due to his acute inebriation, whilst also offering word play which subtly adds to certain key thematic connotations. It is interesting that at one point the Consul conceives of pretending to be 'an Icclander or a visitor from the

Andes or Argentina'(78), Bustementa thought of him as 'The Americano'(34), his mistake having to be corrected by Laruelle, whilst the interrogatory police chiefs also are confused by Firmin's nationality: 'What are you for? Inglés? Español? Americano? Aleman? Russish?'(358) In such ways the Consul is made to become a kind of Everyman figure representing a global consciousness of mankind at large; on a more specific level he typifies any exile or outsider figure lost and confused in a threatening country with a different culture and language to his own. (Lowry's own two stays in Mexico in '36 and '44 both involved him in skirmishes with the police.)

Under the Volcano even extends its boundaries beyond global or earthbound limits in that it includes a detailed examination of astronomy as well. Mendelson makes the suggestion: 'All encyclopedic narratives include a full account of at least one technology or science. That is they correlate the opposed worlds of aesthetic freedom (which is reflected in art) and natural necessity (which is reflected in science) far more elaborately than most other literary works'.<sup>22</sup> In the case of the Volcano astronomy and astro-physics would seem to constitute Lowry's fundamental science, although his fascination with numerology (see Numbers) might betray mathematical, or at least arithmetical, concerns, and these are enhanced on geometrical and mechanical levels in his apparent obsession with circles, wheels and machines. Margerie Bonner, Lowry's second wife, was a keen amateur astronomer and she gradually awakened her husband's interest in the subject during the writing of the novel. In the Volcano it is Yvonne, essentially an amalgam of Lowry's two wives,

who has taken a university course in astronomy, and who, rather perversely (or not, if one adopts a feminist approach) is promoted into becoming the book's scientific consciousness in opposition to the fundamentally artistic consciousnesses personified by the Consul and Laruelle; in Chapter Nine we are told that she 'even dreamed briefly of becoming the "Madame Curie" of astronomy' (264). On his return from a brief though eventful stroll the Consul finds his ex-wife poring over the 'amateur astronomy' magazine 'she subscribed to' (86) and this incident leads on to a brief discussion between them in which ancient Mayan observational practice and knowledge is deemed redundant in comparison to the 'Copernican system' (86).<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, a wealth of astronomical reference does not really come into play until Chapter Eleven when the rapidly encroaching sunset allows Lowry to provide us with an extended tour of the night sky:

Scorpio, setting ... Sagittarius, Capricornus; ah, there, here they were, after all, in their right places, their configurations all at once right, recognized, their pure geometry scintillating, flawless. And tonight as five thousand years ago they would rise and set: Capricorn, Aquarius, with, beneath, lonely Formalhaut; Pisces; and the Ram; Taurus, with Aldebaran and the Pleides. 'As Scorpio sets in the south-west, the Pleides are rising in the north-east.' 'As Capricorn sets in the west, Orion rises in the east. And Cetus, the Whale, with Mira'. (322)<sup>24</sup>

Admittedly, Lowry's fascination with the constellations is as much astrological as it is astronomical, yet for him, as for Yeats,<sup>25</sup> for example, the two areas cannot be easily separated. Equally a rational exploration of what scientists term the space/time continuum becomes manipulated by Lowry into an examination of more

occult or para-normal phenomena such as coincidence and fate. Virtually at the centre of the novel Hugh recalls a fleeting encounter with Einstein who strolled up to him in the courtyard of a Cambridge college to ask for the time. Lowry describes this chance meeting in terms of 'orbits crossing'(186); moreover, it takes place at the time of 'the first approach of the evening star'(186), virtually the same time - sunset - that on the fateful Day of the Dead, 1938 the Consul and Yvonne will be killed. (Lowry's gamesmanship is again evident when he tells us that Einstein has suddenly emerged from 'the rooms of the Professor living in D4'(186) - D4 possibly suggesting the fourth dimension?)

Elsewhere in this study I hope to demonstrate Lowry's employment of sundry cabballistical (or more generally 'mystical') areas of reference as and when they directly impinge on the structure and form of his novel. In the present context though it may be useful to quote Binns when he says, 'The wide range of reference made in Under the Volcano to crack metaphysicians and obscure learning contributes greatly to what are called its "transcendental" and "visionary" qualities; it also gives the novel something in common with other encyclopedic fictions such as Tristram Shandy, Moby-Dick, Ulysses and Ada'.<sup>26</sup> Certainly, the entire field of the Occult, with its emphasis on hidden meanings, not only greatly contributes to the encyclopedic scope of the Volcano, it also acts, in an analogous fashion, to reveal something of the manner of the novel itself, in that various buried patterns or 'correspondences' only come to light after innumerable hours of devoted and frenetic study. (In passing, I might add that there

is more foundation for an occult-orientated reading of the text than would seem to be the case with Moby-Dick, Ulysses<sup>27</sup> or Gravity's Rainbow, for example, all of which have been subjected to rigorous cabbalistic analyses, although admittedly it is interesting that the Cabbala should feature to some extent in many literary encyclopedias.)

The catalogue or list would appear to be a device integral to any potential encyclopedic narrator's method - Moby-Dick and Ulysses provide countless examples. Lowry too is not reticent to cram his text with sundry inventories relating to vastly different fields of human knowledge. At such junctures the narrative progression, what little there is, breaks down totally, the text instead lingering on a different sort of progression; one which centres itself on the prolonged enumeration of different types or examples within an already defined generic category; moreover, these catalogues tend to focus attention more onto the erudite display of the self-conglomerating material they include than onto the material itself, most of which seems redundant. In a sense the lists become virtual concrete poems, signifiers without signifieds, revealing the text's own autonomy by showing it to be often only a verbal exercise devoid of didactic repercussions. At the Salon Ofelia the Consul reels off an alphabetical list of 'rare' elements, whimsically concluding with the three of his own verbal invention: 'Europium and Germanium - ah! and Columbium'(306); earlier in the day he had provided Yvonne with an elaborate resumé of the ancient Mayan names for the months of the year(86), whilst in a child's exercise book he finds at the fair he methodically peruses a basic English/Spanish grammar exercise. In Chapter One, Laruelle provides

us with an extensive itinerary of the route taken by Firmin's steamer, the s.s. Samaritan, around the East Indies during the later stages of World War One (38); earlier he had proceeded to mentally correlate a personal choice of German Expressionist films and film-makers(30). Lowry gives us a long restaurant menu<sup>28</sup> in Spanish(329), a catalogue of Catholic saints for the days of December(352), a table of the obscure genital complaints in which Vigil specialises(352), a run-down, by way of her old luggage labels, of Yvonne's more recent global peregrinations(72), an index to some of the moon's more prevalent geological features(323), and, of course, occasionally, the Consul's endless obsession with alcohol allows for a mouth-watering array of drinks he either literally(323) or metaphorically(294) sees before him.

Under the Volcano is, perhaps above all else, an encyclopedia of alcohol, a drinker's guide or handbook, and a drunkard's paradise (that is if he has no wish, like Firmin, of sobering himself up). Dale Edmonds observes that 'References to drinks, drinking, drinking places, and/or drunkanness occur on 252 of the 377 pages';<sup>29</sup> he goes on to give the 'nine different potations the Consul ingests on the Day of the Dead',<sup>30</sup> and further claims that in the course of the novel 'Lowry mentions virtually every other alcoholic beverage known to man'.<sup>31</sup> Indeed the book's longest 'dry' stretch is paradoxically the nine or so pages in which Lowry describes Hugh's adolescent sea adventures, which again serves to epitomise the polarity between water and alcohol portrayed elsewhere in terms of the Consul's revulsion at the potential 'cleansing' properties of fountains, pools, streams, etc.;

Hugh and Yvonne take a couple of swims during the day, the Consul doesn't.

If the catalogue or list is a method Lowry makes the most of in order to represent his encyclopedic concerns, then another device he employs to reveal the scope of his novel is one in which he draws attention to its inherent size by referring to suitably large objects which deliberately act as symbols for the text as a whole. Mendelson comments: 'All encyclopedias metast~~size~~size the monstrousness of their own scale by including giants or gigantism'.<sup>32</sup> In terms of Under the Volcano its title already reveals the gigantic object which will perform such a metaphorical role (indeed the novel's title can be further manipulated in this context in order to suggest that Lowry's encyclopedic intentions demonstrate him as collating his vast themes 'under' a suitably large heading). As the action of the book gradually proceeds, it becomes apparent that the protagonists are moving closer towards the volcano (or volcanoes, as there are really a pair of giants<sup>33</sup> in question): 'Before him [the Consul] the volcanoes precipitous, seemed to have drawn nearer. They towered up over the jungle, into the lowering sky - massive interests moving up in the background'(316). At such points, in the last third or quarter of the text, we are perhaps meant to ponder on the rapidly accruing size or scope of the novel itself in that motifs which were present earlier now find themselves having to become increasingly redefined in ever larger contexts in that their depth is achieved by nature of their dependance through cross-reference to previous appearances. An example of this in action will conveniently reveal another method by which Lowry proclaims the range of his novel. The first paragraph conveniently places Quahnahuac on the same



latitude as 'Juggernaut, in India'(9) and later in the chapter, and throughout the book, references are made to Geoff and Hugh both having been born in northern India; in Chapter Six Hugh recalls a song which he compares appropriately 'to elephants trampling in moonlight, an old Parlophone rhythm classic (entitled, tersely, Juggernaut)'(159) - by now the Indian connection is enlarged to include 'elephants trampling'; at the close of the book the Consul and Yvonne die virtually simultaneously in a way which suggests the ancient Hindu rites of Juggernaut where wives were immolated on their husbands' funeral pyres, Yvonne, in the light of Hugh's 'Parlophone rhythm classic', being 'trampled in moonlight' not by an elephant but by a gigantic horse.

The encyclopedic genre of Western literature is the one into which Lowry projects the Volcano. His reasons would seem twofold: firstly, he can include a vast array of different, seemingly conflicting material by so doing; secondly, he can nevertheless correlate that material, demonstrating it to be not wayward but interconnected, by placing it all into one bag and tagging on an encyclopedic label. The basic dichotomy between chaos and order which the novel plays with on a multitude of levels is thus already encapsulated by means of the specific generic category, that of encyclopedic narrative, to which it aligns itself: what at first may seem a ~~fragmented~~ and divergent pot-pourri becoming increasingly and readily structured automatically simply by its inclusivity. One thinks of a collage: a multitude of conflicting ideas, motifs, colours, etc., yet all stuck within close proximity of each other and onto the same surface.

ENCYCLOPEDIA NARRATIVE - NOTES

1. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters (London, 1967), p.81.
2. - David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano: Myth, Symbol, Meaning (New York, 1978), pp.217-218.
3. - Ronald Binns, 'Materialism and Magic in Under the Volcano! Critical Quarterly, Vol.23, No.1 (Manchester University Press, Spring, 1981), p.21.
4. - Many, though by no means all, of these allusions are to be found in Markson's chapter-by-chapter analysis of the novel.
5. - Edward Mendelson, 'Gravity's Encyclopedia', Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon, ed. George Levine and David Leverenz, (Boston, 1976) p.164. (Some of the 'inspiration' for this encyclopedic analysis of the Volcano derived from my reading of both Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow and Mendelson's essay thereon.)
6. - Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano, p.73.
7. - See Ronald Walker, 'The Barranca of History: Mexico as Nexus of Doom in Under the Volcano! Infernal Paradise: Mexico and the Modern English Novel (University of California Press, 1978). Walker notes that 'the murals are replete with Mexican iconography which Lowry adopts for his own purposes throughout the novel: bearded conquistadors on horse-back brandishing swords, the white-linen-clad Zapata with a machete and his legendary white horse, the stealthy crossing of a barranca, Malinche and Cortes, a white hacendado reclining in a hammock and being served a beverage by an Indian servant, a coffer being filled with gold coins, the defoliation of the native landscape and the sale of fruits and melons in a marketplace, dead and dying Indians lying prostrate amidst the headlong chaos and confusion of conquest' (p.258).
8. - Markson notes that 'Blake and Dore, both "happened" to do illustrations for the Divine Comedy.' (See David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano, p.29.)
9. - Just as Quincey's name perhaps derives from the writer Thomas de Quincey (Markson comments on borrowings from de Quincey's famous Macbeth essay (op.cit.pp.78-79), Yvonne's maiden name Constable from the painter, so the gun-running Weber is given a musical 'ancestor'. The little artistic trio add yet another neat, though virtually inconsequential, ordering system or pattern to the novel.

10. - The protagonist of Wilderness's novella in progress in 'Through the Panama' is called Martin Trumbaugh.
11. - For most of his life Lowry was a keen and avid devotee of most forms of jazz. He could play the piano (slightly) but his real instrument was the bango-ukelele, which was basically developed with the rhythmic aspects of the jazz spectrum in mind. Nevertheless in his forties he apparently once announced to his wife 'that he was through with jazz: it belonged to his adolescence, not his maturity'. (see Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, p.41)  
The jazz/classical dichotomy provides another small piece of evidence to suggest that Lowry began Under the Volcano 'as' Hugh but completed it 'as' the Consul.
12. - In his letter to Cape Lowry disagrees with their reader who he suggests seems to say that 'a work of art should have but one subject'. However, in the next sentence he whimsically says, 'Perhaps it will be seen that the Volcano, after all, has but one subject'. (Selected Letters, p.62.)
13. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.66.
14. - *ibid.*, p.84.
15. - Samuel Beckoff, Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano: A Critical Commentary (New York, 1975), p.62.
16. - Edward Mendelson, 'Gravity's Encyclopedia', Mindful Pleasures, p.164.  
Mendelson's list of encyclopedias is 'Dante's Commedia, Rabelais's five books of Gargantua and Pantagruel, Cervantes's Don Quixote, Goethe's Faust, Melville's Moby-Dick, and Joyce's Ulysses' (p.161); and to these he adds, in the light of his essay, Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow. In support of his argument that 'an encyclopedic narrative normally also includes an account of an art outside the realm of written fiction' he cites 'the carved bas-reliefs in the Purgatorio, the puppetry of Don Quixote, the Greek Tragedy in Faust, whale-painting in Moby-Dick, the musical echoes in Ulysses's "Sirens", and film and opera in Gravity's Rainbow (p.164). From my own reading of Mendelson's encyclopedic narratives the discussion of the arts of painting and sculpture would appear to be more central to Under the Volcano than either the Purgatorio or Moby-Dick, the Greek Tragedy in Faust is also present in the Volcano, whilst the musical echoes of "Sirens" and Pynchon's analysis of film and opera would seem equally, if not more pronounced, in Lowry's novel. (Mendelson's inclusion of puppetry in Don Quixote would seem a rather 'forced' example to say the least.)

It may be interesting to note here also that Mendelson's encyclopedias (excepting Gravity's Rainbow of course which seems to borrow much from the Volcano) are all,

in one way or another, assimilated into Lowry's novel: the book was originally meant to represent the Inferno section of a Modern Divine Comedy and Dante-esque references and allusions are scattered everywhere; its carnival setting and grotesquerie give it much in common with Rabelais; both the Consul and Hugh compare themselves to Don Quixote, whilst the bartender at the Salon Ofelia is called Cervantes; the Faust archetype pervades the text and the novel's final epigraph is a quotation from Goethe; occasional whale appearances, plus the omnipresent sea metaphor, betray distinct Melvillean overtones; finally, the single day time structure, the mythic parallels, the epic format, the interior monologues, etc. can do little else except to suggest, if not reveal, Ulysses.

17. - See, for example, Paul G. Tiessen, 'Malcolm Lowry and the Cinema', Canadian Literature, No.44 (Spring), pp.57-66.
18. - Much of the novel's historical background is outlined in Walker's perceptive reading of the novel, 'The Barranca of History'.
19. - Mexican cultural history, especially its architecture, as well as a mass of other 'factual' information, is given further extended play in the guide-book to Taxcala which the Consul locates in the lavatory at the Salon Ofelia. The device of 'direct quotation' from the manual enables Lowry to parody guide-book jargon.
20. - Ronald Binns, 'Materialism and Magic in Under the Volcano', Critical Quarterly p.26.
21. - Mendelson, 'Gravity's Encyclopedia', Mindful Pleasures, p.163.
22. - *ibid.*, p.164.
23. - Lawrence Clipper has discovered that Yvonne's magazine is in fact a 'specific issue (June, 1939)' of a magazine which actually exists, entitled The Sky. In it is included 'a lengthy and scholarly discussion of the Mayan calendar with an emphasis on their method of counting'. See Lawrence Clipper, 'Yvonne's Astronomy Magazine', Malcolm Lowry Newsletter, No.6 (Spring, 1980), p.4.
24. - For Yvonne to actually 'see' all the constellations and stars described here would entail the sky being very clear and this would be a rarity in the otherwise humid climate of southern Mexico; moreover, the massive thunderstorm Lowry conjures up, like Vigil conjuring 'a flaring lighter out of his pocket so swiftly it seemed it must have been already ignited there'(12), to accompany his novel's dramatic denouncement would seem to render the sightings virtually an impossibility.

25. - See, for example, the importance Yeats ascribes to the phases of the moon in A Vision.
26. - Ronald Binns, 'Materialism and Magic in Under the Volcano', Critical Quarterly, p.26.
27. - See, for example, the notes to Melville's Moby-Dick, ed. Harold Beaver (Penguin, 1972) especially pp.849-852; and Jackson I. Cope, 'Joyce's Kabbalah' in Joyce's Cities: Archaeology of the Soul (John Hopkins University Press, 1981).
28. - In his Biography Douglas Day gives the following account of a visit by John Davenport to Lowry's college rooms in Cambridge: 'Pinned on the walls were restaurant bills from many countries, reproductions of paintings by Chagall and Henri Rousseau, and other objects, all of which obviously had some totemic significance for their owner. Davenport sensed that a mysterious order somehow underlay the chaos'. Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography (London, 1974), p.112.
29. - Dale Edmonds, 'Mescallusions or The Drinking Man's Under the Volcano', Journal of Modern Literature, Vol.6 No.2 (Spring, 1977)p.278.
30. - *ibid.*, p.279.
31. - *ibid.*, p.279.
32. - Edward Mendelson, 'Gravity's Encyclopedia', Mindful Pleasures, p.164.
33. - Giants frequently come in pairs, for example, Rabelais's Gargantua and Pantagruel or Wagner's Fafner and Fasolt.

MYTHIC AND LITERARY ALLUSIONS

Here marshalled and employed are all the means of expression of that emancipating epoch of which I have already mentioned the echo-effect - especially suitable for a work based wholly on the variation-principle, and thus to some extent static, in which every transformation is itself already the echo of the previous one. It does not lack echo-like continuations, the further repetition of the closing phrase of a theme in higher pitch. There are faint reminiscences of Orphic lamentation, which make Orpheus and Faust brothers as invokers of the world of shades ...

Mann, Doctor Faustus

Lowry extracts the title of his novel from Greek mythology:

Under the volcano! It was not for nothing  
the ancients had placed Tartarus under  
Mt. Aetna, nor within it, the monster  
Typhoeus, with his hundred heads and -  
relatively - fearful eyes and voices. (340)

He precedes his book with three epigraphs, thus quoting from Greek myth, as well as, through Goethe's re-working, from Germanic myth, as well as from Bunyan's allegory; moreover, he concludes the text with a statement relating to both the myths of Adam and Faust, printed in capital letters on a page of its own. One may say, therefore, that even on the most obvious levels, the author has begged to establish with his reader an awareness of the close relationship between certain mythological types and the novel's mainstream narrative. Myth and archetype certainly play a vital dynamic role throughout the novel, yet Lowry often operates by means of flimsy analogy only, not through direct statement: the greater the individual reader's knowledge of 'myth' (Greek, Roman, Teutonic, Scandinavian, Aztec), the greater his awareness of mythic undertones at play. Lowry more than points the way at his use of myth, the precise nuances and details of his usage must be eked out by ourselves.

In his preface to The Portrait of a Lady, Henry James refers to his novel as possessing 'a structure reared with an "architectural" competence'.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps James' use of the building metaphor in discussing the structure and form of a novel was the source for Lowry's similar employment of the image when his protagonist reads a tourist pamphlet about the Tlaxcala Royal Chapel which states: 'Its construction is made out of carved work in

perfect dimensions decorated with allegorical symbols and flowers' (301). Lowry himself admitted that the descriptions of the chapel were comic in intention, thus deliberately satirising the technique and style of Under the Volcano itself.<sup>2</sup> Meshed into this formally balanced narrative structure are innumerable myth references ranging from the overt to the deeply concealed, and varying also in the degrees to which they function as being integral to an understanding of the novel.

Lowry's acute concern with narrative never outweighs his concern with form, both macro- and microcosmic; and myth is thus assimilated to both. Lowry initially planned Under the Volcano to form the inferno part of a Danteque trilogy which he firstly considered calling the Modern Divine Comedy, and then later, when the idea expanded even more, The Voyage That Never Ends.<sup>3</sup> Conrad Knickerbocker writes that Lowry envisaged the sequence as a 'Modern Divine Comedy, with the ultimate goal Hell and redemption'.<sup>4</sup>

One fundamental use of myth in relation to this concept, therefore, is as a general organising principle for the content of the novel sequence. The traditional and timeless quest myth is conceived of in Danteque terms but also often incorporates Christian symbolism and archetypes to create an extra dimension to empirical reality and to convert the action, simultaneously, into a twentieth-century Pilgrim's Progress. Myth functions as a cohering element so that the total structure is a rounded unity rather than the mere lineal progression of a chronologically developed plot. In consequence character-drawing tends to become subordinate to the latent myth-framework of the phase of the quest that is being



explored. In the case of Under the Volcano the plot concerns both a metaphorical and an actual descent into Hell (although this infernal aspect is only one of its mythical infrastructures) each of the four central protagonists representing varying aspects of the human condition, and thus reflecting and refracting various stages of the descent; often operating both as Dante and Virgil, and the figures encountered 'en route', so to speak.

Moreover, various minor persons encountered on the protagonists' travels also appear to reflect aspects of the central quartet (see Mirrorings). The location of reflections of elements of the individual person in others is a feature of Lowry's novel which becomes greatly developed when we find a variety of mythic archetypes which can be made to correspond to his central figures. The character of the Consul is constructed out of archetypal features to such an extent that they not only help in, but actually do, determine his role, and David Markson outlines a few of them for us:

Faust, Dante, Prometheus, Hercules, Buddha, Oedipus. He is Aeneas, Hamlet, Noah, Judas, Prospero, Narcissus, Trotsky, Macbeth, Shelley, Scrooge, Quetzalcoatl, Bix Beiderbecke, Candide, Moses, and Gogol's Tchitchikov - if not to add Peter Rabbit and the Fisher King among many more. 5

Of the 'many more' I should like to add: Christ, Hamlet's father, Julius Caesar, Othello, Captain Ahab, the Melville character of Typee and Omoo, Lord Jim, Kurtz, Wotan, Parsifal, Siegfried, Roderick Usher, Rousseau (philosopher), Rousseau (painter), Perseus, Cortez, Gauguin and Childe Harold.

The same mythic underpinning is true, to a lesser extent, of the Consul's ex-wife, Yvonne, especially when she can be made to function in terms of providing an archetypal female role in relation to some of the Consul's personae: Eve to Adam, Marguerite to Faust, Beatrice to Dante, Jocasta to Oedipus, Dido to Aeneas, both Ophelia and Gertrude to Hamlet and his father's ghost, Miranda to Prospero, Lady Macbeth to Macbeth, Desdemona to Othello, Brünnhilde to Siegfried, Usher's sister to Usher, Malinche to Cortez, etc. By contrast the Consul's half-brother, Hugh, is a far more complex and less easily definable figure, within an 'archetypal' context that is, although again, his mythic status is outlined in terms of the Consul's: Virgil to Dante, Claudius to Hamlet's father, Judas to Christ, the snake to Adam, Brutus to Caesar, Iago to Othello, Marlowe to Lord Jim and Kurtz, and, by extension, Marlowe to Doctor Faustus too, the narrator to Usher, etc. Note that often his mythic role is one of the betrayer who brings about the 'fall' of the tragic hero, though frequently, in terms of Under the Volcano, this play is made deliberately ironic by nature of both Lowry's twisting of myth for his own ends (for example, it is not so much Hugh as the snake/Devil who tempts the Consul/Adam to the forbidden fruit/alcohol, as the Consul's own craving), and the Consul's hallucinatory obsession with seeing Hugh as a betrayer (for example, Hugh/Claudius does not murder the Consul/Hamlet's father for Yvonne/Gertrude, the Consul, however, insists on seeing himself as being 'murdered' by his half-brother with this end - Yvonne/Gertrude - in mind).

Adam, Eve and the Devil; Hamlet's father, Gertrude and Claudius; Othello, Desdemona and Iago; and the trio immured in the

crumbling and decaying House of Usher enable Lowry to exploit mythic or archetypal threesomes in relation to his three central characters: the complex engineering and manipulation of these archetypal circumstances allows Lowry the opportunity of 'providing' his agile reader with an almost infinite series of minor possibilities and nuances, for example, Yvonne as Usher's sister is literally 'buried alive' by the stampeding horse, whilst her subsequent inability to rescue the Consul could be said to 'bring the house down' in both senses - microstructurally, the family, and macrostructurally, the house as an image for the whole world - only Hugh, the narrator, in this case, although, of course, he is not the narrator of Under the Volcano, survives (again recalling perhaps Ishmael to Ahab) to 'tell the tale', although in a more convincing sense in the Volcano, at least, this task is left to Laruelle. My reading of the relation between Under the Volcano and 'The Fall of the House of Usher' is highly subjective: certainly Poe's story can be seen to conform to a fragment of the novel's logical or 'immediate level', as Dale Edmonds phrased it,<sup>6</sup> in the manner underlined, as well as in other ways too, though whether Lowry intended us to assimilate such a reading is, and will always remain, uncertain. Moreover, an understanding of the novel's connections with 'The Fall' in no way at all clarifies our understanding or comprehension of what Under the Volcano is about; in my view, if anything, it merely further complicates and, together with all the other literary parallels, obliterates the possibility of 'meaning' or significance. In a sense then, Lowry achieves his intention: the befuddlement of the reader. In more than one way 'The Fall of the House of Usher' can be said to bear

absolutely no connection at all with the events described in Lowry's novel: no one is buried alive, no one re-emerges from live burial, no house collapses. One might argue that Lowry is here (and in many other places as well) playing a game with his reader - pushing him on to assimilate his own mental filing cabinet of mythic or archetypal undercurrents. The manoeuvre is as profound or as ridiculous as the simile through which Lowry assists in meretriciously implanting the process of speculation in the first place: 'Darkness had fallen like the House of Usher'(27).

The infrastructure of myth which underlies the narrative relates basically to the Consul and is a contributory factor in determining the form of the novel. For example, even subsidiary myth, such as the Cabbala, is integrated into the formal concern. It is the 'formal' aspect lying at the heart of his mythic underpinning, the way in which myth can resonate layers of implied structure, which seems to fascinate Lowry above all else (see below). Nonetheless, briefly shelving my scepticism concerning the meaning in, or the reason behind, the Poe parallels, one might say that the treatment of character in terms of archetype has two basic functions. Firstly, creating an analogy between a character and a mythic or literary figure raises the stature of the former and widens the dimension of the action so that it transcends the domestic and the particular and comes to occupy a timeless and archetypal area of significance. At the same time, in that often the comparison is neither straight nor passive, but rather dynamically manipulated, the original myth becomes modified and transformed towards a new

relevance in the light of the fictive exploration. Secondly, where there is an obvious disparity, rather than a similarity, between character and myth-analogue, the archetype functions in the role of offering a commentary on the situation, and usually with an ironic, or at least comic, intention. For example, within the context of the Consul's interest in black magic and his agonies as a helpless drunkard, the frequent identification with Christ is jarring, to say the least. (Similarly though, in the sense in which the Consul is, fundamentally, a good man (if a confused one) any identification with the Devil, say, is equally hard to take seriously.)

Just as Lowry satirised his own style and formal obsessions by means of reference to an over-decorated chapel, so too in the novel can be found a mockery of his mythic intentions, for on the panels of a carousel the Consul observes, 'A daub which apparently represented Medea sacrificing her children turned out to be of performing monkeys' (217). Not only is this a tragicomic reduction of the idea of sacrifice, which, after all, constitutes one of the novel's more dominant themes, it also, perhaps even more significantly, suggests that if we examine the respective presentation of myths more closely, a direct reversal, if not a downright reduction, of what is superficially apparent may be found.

The two volcanoes which dominate the landscape of the novel are themselves objective correlatives for the condition, in this instance 'tragic' perhaps, of the Consul's relationship with Yvonne.<sup>7</sup> They express, in the Indian folk legend, the story

that\ 'Popocatepetl himself was strangely the dreamer: the fires of his warrior's love, never extinct in the poet's heart, burned eternally for Ixtaccihuatl, whom he had no sooner found than lost, and whom he guarded in her endless sleep'(318-319). In this instant the mythic analogy could be said to be extremely direct, especially in relation to the phrase, 'whom he had no sooner found than lost'; nevertheless, the 'fires of ... love' which 'burned eternally' might already be read in terms of the Consul's fiery love of alcohol with which he constantly seeks to burn himself, whilst 'whom he guarded in her endless sleep' might be classed as largely redundant in terms of the novel's action, though we can again manufacture a few tentative possibilities - the Consul and Yvonne achieve a reunion in death; Yvonne is truly 'dead' whilst the Consul's ghost lives to haunt Laruelle; or, even more perversely, the Consul can be seen, in his identification with Lowry himself, as the book's organising consciousness: he guards her in terms of the book he has 'written', as Dante 'guarded' the memory of the dead Beatrice in his Paradiso, etc.

Anyway, whereas the archetypes which go to make up the Consul are overtly presented, with Yvonne they are often only implicitly present as contrary to his. On the surface she is Eve to the Consul's Adam and like him has lost an innocence and freedom for which she is, nevertheless, forever still seeking. Like the boy Garry in Lunar Caustic, she suffers from a 'recurrent nightmare of things collapsing'(262), and Plantagenet's analysis of the boy in Lowry's novella is as valid for her too: 'And all his stories are about things collapsing, falling apart. Don't you see buried in all that wreckage his craving for freedom?'<sup>8</sup>

Yvonne feels herself a victim of dark forces, and like the other protagonists she is, in her own way, a failure, trapped in her own doomed predicament as surely as the eagle which she sees in the cage. She forever dreams of an Eden (thus again confusing our possible identification of the Consul's garden as the same), but paradise seems only attainable to her through death (and even this notion is endowed by many ironic counterbalances). As a Faust figure the Consul represents the demonic aspect of human nature, though much more too (Goethe appears to posit the quest for knowledge, above all else, as a distinctly positive virtue), whereas Yvonne, by contrast, represents Marguerite and innocence. (One cannot, however, take the parallel to its logical conclusions as many critics seem to have done; those who say that the Consul's and Yvonne's respective spiritual fates are anticipated in Marguerite's ascent to Paradise and Faust's descent into the abyss simply do not appear to have read the conclusion to part two of Goethe's epic.) However, whereas the animal motif of the ugly and doomed pariah dog attaches itself to the Consul, with regard to Yvonne the motif of the butterfly (traditional myth symbol for the soul) recurs to anticipate her spiritual fate at death, or at least the spiritual fate she presumes awaits her; in a sense, she will be like the butterfly caught by the cat: 'the insect whose wings had never ceased to beat, suddenly and marvellously, flew out as might indeed the human soul from the jaws of death, flew up, up, up, soaring over the trees'(144) - see also Animals. Whereas the Consul succumbs to the animal forces of nature, Yvonne ~~and though~~ <sup>and though</sup> by his mastery of the bull, conquer them. When Yvonne uncages the eagle she gives it the freedom she herself craves, but when the Consul lets loose the tethered horse he merely unleashes destruction

(though, once again, the equation is not quite so simple: Yvonne's freeing of the eagle smacks of a self-justification for her giving up the pursuit of the Consul, a kind of all-relinquishing cry of 'oh, let him go', whilst the Consul, outraged by the fate of the Indian, partially attempts, at least, to make amends for his earlier failure to act on the dying man's behalf, by now releasing his horse and, simultaneously, symbolically rejecting what he gradually sees to be the Fascists' hold on everything). Perhaps one can safely say that in death, as in life, the Consul and Yvonne represent two irreconcilable forces, yet, even here, there is an ultimate hint of unity and redemption, perhaps in the enigmatic remark of the mysterious Senora Gregorio who envisages two lovers 'laughing together in some kernice place where you can laugh'(233), the 'kernice' perhaps suggesting both a secluded 'corner' as well as a 'kernel' out of which such a possible largescale redemption might spring? - large-scale that is, in the sense that the novel, albeit 'Inferno', must also have a natural lead-in to 'Purgatorio'.

Hugh Firmin frequently acts as a foil to his brother. However, unlike the latter, his character is not structured on a few major myth-analogues; rather, his condition is projected through a mosaic of minor myth reference. Hugh's long past-reflecting Chapter - Six - endows him with a much more 'rounded' background than that given to any of the three others (in a sense, Yvonne's Hollywood reminiscences are already mythical). As a romantic and an idealist Hugh functions as an ironic counterpart to the often cynical and disillusioned Consul, whose philosophy of 'why can't people mind their own damned business!'(312) is entirely the reverse of his 'Good Samaritan' brother. Hugh dreams



of saving Christ from imprisonment in a burning church 'where he couldn't breathe' (242) and of subsequently being rewarded by Stalin with a medal. In a sense this fantasy expresses Hugh's desire to act for the good of the world, though the reward from Stalin (a tyrant, though not seen as such in the idealistic eyes of Hugh Firmin: for him, Stalin is perhaps more of a saviour than Christ) again succeeds in reducing the situation. Elsewhere, Hugh describes Communism as being the 'spirit in the modern world playing a part analogous to that of Christianity in the old' (306). This statement, together with the dream, expresses Hugh's latent desire to save his brother (who is identified with Christ) from the flames of a very real Hell, though again the 'reality' of that Hell, in terms of the Consul's painful degeneration, is reduced by Hugh's partial identification of it with capitalism. The aesthetically-orientated, and perhaps elitist, Laruelle forewarns us of this aspect of Hugh's character: 'In half an hour he'd [Laruelle] dismissed him as an irresponsible bore, a professional indoor Marxman' (14).

Outwardly at least, the authentic quality of Hugh's Samaritan urges - his attitude to the Spanish Civil War, and his desire to aid the dying Indian - contrasts with the seeming superficiality of the Consul's brutally cynical outlook, though once again the contrast is not so self-evident once one begins to look beneath the surface. Basically, Hugh had been to Spain already, but had soon elected to return to the New World, whilst his efforts to help the dying Indian remain somewhat half-hearted - he allows himself to be pushed back on the bus by the Fascists and restrained by his brother (in this sense the Indian's groan

of 'Companero'(250) to him is again savagely ironic). Viewed through the Consul's consciousness, it is Hugh who is projected as the prime agent of betrayal, and his 'betrayal' of the Indian reinforces this aspect of his personality for us, though, admittedly, he helped him more than either the Consul and Yvonne and, especially with the appearance of the armed vigilantes, what else could he do? Lowry frequently leaves us on the very knife's edge of indecision in regard to how we view certain key scenes of the book: the mythic underpinning here of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Hugh neither passes him by nor helps him) assists in adding weight to the predicament, and also in strengthening the ultimate ambiguity). Certainly, in regard to the Consul's and Yvonne's shattered marriage, there is some (again just how much is for us to decide) justification for seeing him as a Judas figure. We are told he has cuckolded other husbands besides the Consul, and by his interference in his brother's marriage, which, however, had already irrevocably broken down owing to Geoffrey's alcoholism, he helps in justifying both the Consul's self-pity, as well as his over-dramatic imagination - his desire, almost, to be betrayed. 'Mythically', Lowry also plays with this aspect of Hugh's character - his affair with Yvonne - by making him into something of a picaresque or affable rogue; an adventurer, in the widest sense of the term, who wouldn't be far out of place in an eighteenth-century 'Bildungsroman'. However, by his mere presence on the day of Yvonne's return, he also greatly influences his brother's jealousy, and indeed he does seem to spend most of the day in the company of Yvonne: 'Et tu Brute! The Consul could feel his glance at Hugh becoming a cold look of hatred'(305).

Nevertheless, the Consul's interpretation of Hugh as a Judas-figure is frequently mistaken and falsely accentuates a phase in Hugh's past which he now seems to have largely discarded. Besides simply to concentrate on Hugh as a Judas, though he takes the brunt of the comparisons, is to forget that each of the other three protagonists also have streaks of treachery in their make-up. Yvonne and Laruelle have also betrayed the Consul through adultery, whilst the Consul is also forever betraying himself: his moral attitude to Yvonne's affairs contrasts somewhat confusingly with his own drunken and unprotesting involvement with the prostitute Maria; even more ironical (if we take the side of the coin which incriminates Firmin), is the episode in his life when he was a naval officer on the s.s. Samaritan, a camouflaged and heavily-armed warship which posed as an innocent steamer to lure German submarines into a fateful trap - the Consul, it is suggested, committed a private act of murder by consigning captured German officers to the ship's furnaces; moreover, as a Faustian black magician, the Consul deliberately betrays his own soul to the powers of darkness.<sup>9</sup>

Geoffrey's attitude to Hugh is always patronising, ranging across the younger brother's life, as well as on the day that the bulk of the action occurs. For example, he identifies him with Don Quixote, 'Never mind, old boy, it would have been worse than the windmills(250). This last mocking analogy becomes reiterated at the Salon Ofelia during the scene where Hugh expounds his idealistic beliefs with the Consul frequently interrupting with loud shouts of 'Cervantes!'(306). Throughout the novel the Consul seems vaguely contemptuous of 'that romantic little urge'(66)

in Hugh, and is forever seeking to mock his half-brother for it. Even when Hugh reverses the original roles of their younger relationship and tries to assist the Consul in a father/protector role, the latter simply views this paternalism with sardonic contempt, and labels it, playing 'Theodore Watts Dunton. To my Swinburne'(66).

Hugh often seems considerably more perceptive than the Consul and admits to himself that he is 'a sentimentalist, a muddler, a realist, a dreamer, a coward hypocrite, hero'(186). In this respect the reference to a character in Anna Karenina who was 'a man who had tried everything and been a failure at all of them'(313) seems to fit Hugh quite well, and he realises it. In contrast, when the Consul refers to another character in Tolstoy's novel, 'a bragging degenerate obviously convinced after he'd been drinking that he was doing something heroic', his failure to realise the applicability of the analogy to his own situation demonstrates his myopic outlook.

The four minor analogues of the Good Samaritan, Judas, Brutus and Don Quixote only possess a limited function though in accentuating certain areas of Hugh's character. Moreover, it is important to remember that it is the Consul himself who makes these analogies and perhaps consequently they tend to distort and caricature, rather than heighten, our views of Hugh for, as with much else, the parallels still retain a certain subjective ambiguity. By contrast, the Consul never seems to transcend the framework of the myths which are constructed around him by the author; though the Consul eventually attains a mythic stature, his actions are

frequently channelled or conditioned by his archetypal roles, and thus his character tends towards a certain flatness.

Hugh only rarely seems to become a grandiose myth-figure 'in his own right'; however, he perhaps achieves it during his final appearance in Chapter Eleven. Here, threads of his past coalesce to make up a pattern of significance which correlates Hugh's situation with that of Orpheus. In Greek mythology Orpheus was the most famous poet and musician who ever lived,<sup>10</sup> and, idealistically, Hugh dreams of a similar role for himself, ironically translated into contemporary terms as the writer of popular danceband tunes. However, Hugh's compositions, with titles such as 'I'm Homesick for Being Homesick (of being homesick for home)', never quite manage to surpass 'the requisite thirty-two bars, of an equal banality, and [are] even faintly touched with moronism' (160), and he perceives his own mediocrity, plagiarism, and failure. Nevertheless, he does enjoy limited success of a kind as a guitarist: whereas Orpheus attained enchanting effects by playing his lyre, Hugh quickly discovers that his guitar playing enables him to impress and seduce other men's wives; and just as Orpheus embarked on a sea-quest (with the Argonauts) so the adolescent Hugh too embarks on a round-the world sea-voyage, hoping for, amongst other things, 'unlimited delight in the brothels of the Orient'(161).

This frequent and intentional de-sublimation of the Orpheus myth makes Hugh a comic figure and thus operates reductively to negate any analogy in terms of a god-like stature. This treatment of archetype and character again seems to differ then from that of

the Consul, for in his case, though there is often a glaring disparity between his condition and certain myth analogues, the distance is perhaps invariably more 'tragic'. Though the Consul is ironically treated the humour involved is always of a dark or grotesque nature, and this frequently serves to accentuate the pathos of his condition.

When Orpheus descended to Tartarus to bring back Eurydice he temporarily soothed the tortures of the damned and won leave to restore her to the upper world: similarly, Hugh travels south to Quahnahuac to visit his brother and assists in futile efforts to restore him to sobriety, and here he also finds his Eurydice in the shape of his ex-mistress, Yvonne. The conflicting elements in Hugh's personality soon become demonstrated then in the tension between his subconscious desires both to help the Consul and yet also to win back Yvonne. As the fateful Day of the Dead draws to a close the implicit threads of the Orpheus archetype which are latent in Hugh's character and situation, in the penultimate chapter, become overtly presented. Here the action moves from the many times anticipated metaphorical areas of Dante-esque darkness into the very 'heart of darkness' of the forest itself. Moreover, Marlowe's pursuit of Kurtz in Conrad's novella also becomes implicitly invoked in Hugh's search for his half-brother - to parallel Conrad's river Lowry gives his own jungle a 'stream through thickets festooned with convolvuli'(319). As Hugh and Yvonne half-walk, half-run through the forest towards the actual and equally deceptive metaphorical area of illumination, as symbolised by the Farolito (lighthouse), they become, by virtue of the situation, total symbols

for Orpheus and Eurydice. The only condition Hades demanded of Orpheus was that he must not look behind him at Eurydice as he made his way up to the sunlight, otherwise he would lose her forever. Ironically, it is the Consul who is the ~~casual~~ <sup>casual</sup> factor in fulfilling this mythic situation: the horse that he releases gallops terrified through the forest and crashes into Yvonne, killing her; as she cries out for help, Hugh, who has been obliviously singing revolutionary songs, turns round; Yvonne, however, is already dying, and this modification to the myth partially affirms that the central 'responsibility' (whatever that word entails) for the situation belongs to the Consul alone.<sup>11</sup>

Laruelle's thoughts turn to Hugh in the first chapter, where we learn that 'like Hugh he was going to Vera Cruz; and like Hugh too, he did not know if his ship would ever reach port' (15). In this sense then, we are never, therefore, specifically told of Hugh's ultimate fate. Nevertheless, perhaps Lowry cleverly hints at it, in his employment of subsidiary myth references; references reinforcing the idea of impending doom suggested by the fates of Brutus, Judas, Orpheus and Philoctetes: Hugh's guitar playing is also compared with the magical powers of Philoctetes' bow, while the ship he sails on is named the s.s. Philoctetes. Moreover, it was Philoctetes who lit the pyre that immortalised Hercules (and Lowry compares the Consul's situation with the twelve labours of Hercules)<sup>12</sup> and who remained as the dead hero's heir.

To continue the analogy, Hugh sets off for the war in Spain during November in a vessel which he prophesies will 'probably be blown to smithereens' (107), while Philoctetes' fate was to die of a snake bite at the end of the year; the Consul repeatedly alluding to his half-brother as a snake-in-the-grass. One thing is more or less

certain, however: Hugh will reach his True Cross, symbolised by the journey to Vera Cruz, and, in this sense, perhaps also attains salvation.

Lowry is not alone in twentieth-century literature in so far as technique and narrative structured dominantly on the Faust archetype are concerned. Exactly contemporary with Under the Volcano, published in both England and America in 1947, was a novel which contains a structure of vast complexity, in which not only the various dimensions and layers, but within these each submotif and minor variation, is, as in Under the Volcano, also seemingly related to the rest. Certainly Thomas Mann's Doktor Faustus provides an interesting parallel with Lowry's novel since both authors use myth and symbol as dynamic organising principles for works, as noted above, of an almost symphonic texture. Moreover, both Lowry's Geoffrey Firmin and Mann's Adrian Leverkühn are, on one level, tragic heroes (though also imbued with juxtapositional grotesque comic features) whose conditions function as symbols for the wider sickness of society at large.

However, these two writers soon part company in their treatment of metaphorical landscapes. It seems to me, at least, that Mann leaves a larger ambiguity of potential interpretation in so far as, what might be termed, a 'supernatural' level of meaning is concerned. By contrast, Lowry defines an occult basis to the Consul's existence, whether or not Firmin himself is greatly aware of it (though this too is informed with its own specific ambiguity or non-relevance, dependent on our knowledge of the black arts, and how many of its rituals we are prepared to imbue



on the text). Lowry certainly appears to formulate a cosmography with a supernatural area delineated in terms of the Cabbala - a Jewish mythology of sorts returning to a distinctly medieval perspective on reality and thus treating Hell and Paradise as actual rather than metaphorical.<sup>13</sup> The esoteric complexities of the Cabbalistic level within the novel, although perhaps peripheral to the immediate action, nevertheless become 'relevant' in that they function to introduce a series of occult references on a mythic level would seem to substantiate the idea of a divine cosmos, suggested and corroborated by the employment of the Faust analogue.

Like Marlowe's Faustus the Consul is unable to escape his destiny through anonymity, and Lowry quotes from the play in order to reinforce his assertion of the spiritual significance of man. The Consul's death is, however, far from being a meaningless event; unlike Faustus, we are asked not to just 'regard his hellish fall' (40) but to learn from it. This moral inference is also contained in the use of the Christ analogue with the reference to 'a church from whose sooty wall a figure of Christ on the cross had been removed leaving only the scar and the legend: is it nothing to you all, ye who pass by?' (156).

The major source for treating the Consul as a Faust-figure is nevertheless Goethe rather than Marlowe (though critics have not often realised this). In Faust, Goethe himself employs symbol and myth to amplify his themes, whilst in Under the Volcano too symbol and myth function to conjoin the strands within the novel into a densely meshed action. An understanding of the types and functions of myth provides the key for discriminating

between areas of central and peripheral relevance in the detailed and involved progression of both Goethe's and Lowry's 'encyclopaedic narratives'.

All the four major characters of the Volcano become perhaps subtly parodied in the predicament of the man half way up the slippery pole at the fair when they are given dreams of a goal which they seem destined never to attain, and in the case of the ex-director Jacques Laruelle it is the notion of making 'a modern film version of the Faustus story with some such character as Trotsky for its protagonist'(33). The respective situations of the latter and the Consul are later to be identified in several ways: both are exiles or outsiders who meet violent 'political' deaths at approximately the same moment in Mexican history, and the parallel becomes substantial when someone, sarcastically referring to the Consul's beard, calls him 'Trotsky'(358). The Consul both ironically and unconsciously draws these Faustian/Trotskyian strands together when, during his argument with Yvonne about the identity of a bird in their garden, he says, 'He's a coppery-tailed trogon I believe. And he has no red breast. He's a solitary fellow who probably lives way off in the Canyon of the Wolves over there, away off from those other fellows with ideas, so that he can have peace to meditate about not being a cardinal'(79). Like Faust, both Trotsky and the Consul seek to be something far greater than the forces around them will allow, and the result of their misplaced efforts results in premature death. Lowry thus constantly refers the contemporary back to the mythic so that they substantiate and amplify each other, whilst both are forever being re-interpreted in terms of the fictive concern: Under the Volcano

itself therefore provides, in both image and theme, apt content for Laruelle's film - see also Towers.

The Faustian mould of the Consul's condition is crucial to his never-ending battle for freedom; the opportunity of attaining Paradise more often than not ironically contrasts, as the narrative progresses, with the inevitable consequences of losing the struggle (though ultimately the salvation/damnation problem is left ambivalent). The Consul himself is also aware of this fateful choice which informs his existence but frequently reduces his awareness to the level of embittered humour: 'I have resisted temptation for two and a half minutes at least: my redemption is sure'(74). As the novel develops, however, it becomes apparent that the Consul's situation involves more than a simple choice between Heaven and Hell. He becomes a victim to circumstances beyond his immediate control; moreover, though cast into the hellish barranca may equally well be symbolically saved. Towards the end of the novel, the Consul's actions become increasingly re-conditioned by the various costumes appertaining to the archetypal roles and, in a sense, we never know if he is his true self, or 'disguised'. (The original medieval puppet play of Faust perhaps offers an apt technical parallel in this respect; that there the allegory itself was the dominant feature.) At the start of the day the Consul is frequently able to transcend his Faustian role: the sound of churchbells ringing from the city, which persuaded Faust against committing suicide, has no immediate effect on Lowry's hero; instead the Consul deliberately shirks this warning and continues to poison himself with alcohol. In the final chapter, two Faustian familiars battle for his conscience, but as the myths

being to take over from the man they surround, he is informed that 'Even we can help you no longer'(352), and thus Firmin himself becomes at least half-aware of his necessity to remain in the Farolito bar if only to fulfil his mythic destiny. The sense of an ineluctable crisis which pervades the entire tone of the novel is consolidated by innumerable anticipations (some of them ironic) of Yvonne's and Geoffrey's respective fates, for example, in the garden, the already inebriate and tottering Consul 'crashed on through the metamorphoses of dying and reborn hallucinations, like a man who does not know he has been shot from behind'(130); whilst the idea of an impending doom is, of course, already 'announced' and instigated by the oblique prophecies of disaster initiated by Laruelle's nostalgic reveries during the first chapter.

The source of many of the Consul's problems seems to lie in his (perhaps self-appointed) 'role' of black magician: in this respect the Cabbala is introduced to chart his position on an occult plane and is thus meretriciously validated by the policeman's otherwise inaccurate accusation that the Consul has 'murdered a man and escaped through seven states' [my italics] (353) - see also Numbers. However, fantasy plays a substantial role in the Consul's response to life, and seems frequently to be generated by his drunkenness, as when he hazily contemplates 'living among the cohabitations of Faust himself, among the litharge and agate and hyacinth and pearls. A life which is amorphous, plastic and crystalline'(91), and, as such, such incidents can hardly be regarded as substantiating his role as a supposed sorcerer.

The only detail of the Consul's illicit quest for Secret Knowledge through black magic would seem to lie in a bizarre and 'ludicrous' series of references to the 'sensational new data of Atlantis:'(91) he has discovered, and which he dreams of some day including in a book. Hugh, referring to his brother, suggests 'May be he is a black magician'(122), but when he questions Yvonne as to the meaning or relevance of alchemy and cabbala to Geoffrey she is only able to reply with: 'I've never been able to find out'(122). Such incidents can only serve to reinforce an ambivalent response to the authenticity of the Consul's role as a sorcerer. In a moment of (seeming) intense seriousness he prays to an image of the Virgin Mary: 'Give me back my purity, the knowledge of the mysteries, that I have betrayed and lost'(291). On the other hand the Consul also sees himself as 'the pilferer of meaningless muddled ideas out of which his rejection of life had grown'(374).

The solution to these ambiguities seems, as with much else, to be contained in the final chapter, particularly in the Consul's response to the picture entitled Los Borrachones, the drunkards, which functions as another overall emblem for the novel: 'Might it not have another meaning ... beyond the symbolically obvious?'(361) According to the Consul, 'When he had striven upwards as at the beginning with Yvonne, had not the "features" of life seemed to grow more clear?'(361). Yet at the same time he goes on to claim that scenes, and with them the sense of his own reality, had also, in some strange sense, become more separated from himself. There would therefore seem to be a fateful (and fatal) contradiction in the Consul's condition: on one level 'striving

upwards' would seem to endow him with a clearer perspective on life, yet, simultaneously, he discovers that it creates in him a far greater sense of being dissociated from himself: 'striving upwards' therefore would merely seem to increase the Consul's feelings of alienation, whereas through alcohol he is able to achieve the mystic's sense of union with the whole, even if only in a demonic form: 'those florid people ... becoming more like each other, more joined together, more as one fiend, the farther down they hurled into the darkness'(361).

Quintessentially, therefore, the Consul's condition seems yet again, ambivalent even beyond the reasons given, although the progress of human existence itself is already deemed as pre-ordained previous to any modification of the human situation through exploiting black magic. Nevertheless, the Faust analogue still authentically correlates with the Consul's own situation - as the day draws on he comes to realise that he has deliberately degraded himself to a moral and physical nadir, and ultimately he senses that 'there was nowhere to fly to. And it was as if a black dog had settled on his back, pressing him to his seat'(362). This experience certainly parallels that of Faust, although in many ways the latter is in an even worse condition, being unable to make even the slightest effort to arrest his own rapid decline. Of the three major archetypes which are employed to help delineate the Consul's condition the Faust analogue is by far the least ironic since it is the one with which he is made to possess the most direct levels of 'immediate' identification.

The central motif of the novel is that of the garden gone to waste; and this would appear to have triple significance as a symbol for (i) Eden, (ii) Mexico, and (iii) the world. The terrain's metaphoric function is therefore soon overtly presented: Laruelle observes at the start of the novel how in Mexico 'you would find every sort of landscape at once'(15). Besides this geographical parallel with other countries is a political analogy which compares the domestic anarchy of Mexico (where the police are on strike) with the international situation of 1938 (where the League of Nations had similarly ceased to maintain any effective control).

Perhaps in this way the Indian who is found dying by the roadside functions as a symbol for the condition of Czechoslovakia: he pleads for help from Hugh and the Consul groaning 'Companero'(250); and, although Hugh wants to assist, the more realistic and knowledgeable Consul refuses to allow any involvement, telling his brother that 'You can't touch him it's the law'(245). At the same time two diplomatic limousines impatiently surge past, also refusing to help, and thus, possibly, acting as symbols for Britain and France. Anyway, this affair again demonstrates the blurred nature of the Consul's supposedly realistic attitudes - when he was able to become usefully involved he refuses to do so; when it was far too late to help he hits out at the fascist vigilantes and merely initiates a chain of destruction. Ironically, he dies in an almost identical situation to that of the Indian: 'Now he was the one dying by the wayside where no good Samaritan would halt'(375). The fascist Mexican vigilantes and, in the wider context, Nazi Germany (perhaps partly represented by the gun-running 'Weber') represent the

encroaching forces of darkness and evil. By contrast the Consul, through his interest in the Cabbala, and Hugh, explicitly identify themselves with the Jews, 'the cast-out, exploited, and wandering of the earth'(175).<sup>14</sup> The situation of Laruelle, however, makes it clear that the human condition during the war transcends any purely political concern: 'he still felt like a wanderer on another planet ... life would be hard. Though if the Allies lost it would be harder. And in either case one's own battle would go on'(15). We are perhaps meant to be left with these above thoughts as, in the last chronological event in the novel, Jacques enters a cinema while a storm breaks and the lights go out, just as the war is at that moment beginning in Europe.

Most important though, in terms of a mythic bias, are the landscape analogues between Mexico and 'the Earthly Paradise itself' (16). The story of Maximilian and Carlotta is drawn into Lowry's mythic scheme as yet another archetypal projection of the conditions of the Consul and Yvonne and significantly for these two historic figures too Mexico becomes 'their Eden, without either knowing quite why, beginning to turn under their noses into a prison'(20) - see also Gardens. Only Yvonne seems to be consciously aware of the change which has taken place since her last visit to Quahnahuac, saying: 'My God, this used to be a beautiful garden. It was like Paradise'(102). The fact that she is the only character in the novel who correlates Mexico with Eden in terms of the past has several levels of significance: firstly, she is implicitly Eve to the Consul's Adam, and her unique knowledge perhaps reinforces this role because the Eve of Genesis, owing to her transgression, was also the first to become aware of how things had altered in Eden -



Yvonne's main 'sin', of course, is her adultery with Hugh in France and Laruelle in Mexico; secondly, and more importantly, there is an ironic incongruity in the fact that though the traditional Biblical roles have been reversed, since it is the Consul who, through his black magic activities, illicitly eats of the tree of knowledge, it is the Adam figure who fails to realise the overall change that individual responsibility may initiate: the Consul is only aware of a mutation in so far as it concerns the relationship between God and Adam, and he sees Eden itself as remaining unchanged, whilst Yvonne's unique awareness in this instance reinforces the wider impression that, of the four main protagonists, her's is the least blurred outlook.

This transformation which Yvonne observes is frequently substantiated by other details. The Consul states that the place has been 'virtually without a gardener for months' (70), which seems to be the only reference in the novel to suggest the time (albeit vague) that their paradise has been ruined. Since the gardener in Eden was Adam this implies that Yvonne's version of the situation is accurate: the gardener (symbol for humanity as well as the Consul) has been excluded from the garden (Eden, metaphor for contact with God) and hence ruin and corruption become dominant. The most penetrating awareness of the disparity between the ideal and the real in the Earthly Paradise comes from Laruelle: 'Yet ... what had he done? He had made few friends. He had acquired a Mexican mistress with whom he had quarrelled, and numerous Mayan idols' (16). Alienation from the spiritual and ensuing concern with the material thus becomes casual in corrupting the locale. The Consul, for example, undercuts his own statically one-

dimensional outlook by juxtaposing his serious reinterpretation of Biblical myth with a comically incongruous explanation featuring Adam as 'the first property owner, and God, the first agrarian ... kicked him out'(137). Yvonne's wider perspective on the situation is validated in her being the first of the four protagonists to actualise entry to the dreamed of Paradise, or rather to 'believe' she is entering a paradisaal environment - the precise circumstances of Yvonne's death would appear to deny a mono-dimensional view of her 'fate'.

The Adam of Biblical myth is essentially an innocent individual who suffers because of Eve's lack of will in succumbing to temptation, and the fundamental irony of the Consul's embodiment of this archetypal role centres on the disparity between the contemporary and mythic situations. In the chronology of the decline of the Consul the sins of Yvonne as an adultress only come after the process of her husband's alcoholism has begun. The mystic roles are thus reversed: essentially, it is she who is the innocent one, whereas the Consul's feelings of guilt, besides suggesting a residue of 'original sin', traces back to adolescent sensual experiences(?), acts of murder during the First World War(?), and - the greatest sin of all - the use of black magic to illicitly eat of the Tree of Knowledge. This subtle technique of role-reversal is typical of Lowry's method as a writer in creating subterranean dimensions to, what at first simply seems, a veneer of superfluous detail; it certainly integrates with his strong hint that the 'symbolically obvious' (361) contains more complexity than may at first appear.

The role-reversal becomes apparent in the episode which parodies the essential phase of the Eden legend: the Consul runs into his garden to search for a bottle of tequila while in his mind his angelic and demonic familiars argue both for and against giving in to temptation. The bottle of spirits acts as a symbol for the tree of knowledge, which, because of its transcendental possibilities it in effect is, whilst the Consul re-enacts the role of the tempted Eve. As he succumbs and drinks, he gasps 'Bliss, Jesus. Sanctuary ... Horror'(131), and immediately afterwards 'On the path before him a little snake he had thought was a twig was rustling off into the bushes'(131): in such ways symbolic naturalistic detail substantiates the myth analogue.

Two public notices are used to relate to the Eden situation. Initially, the focus of the action intermittently concentrates on the cinema poster for Las Manos de Orlac to suggest the idea of original sin. The protagonist of this film is described in terms which suggest him to be, like the Consul, a microcosm for the guilt of society: 'It's all about a pianist who has a sense of guilt, <sup>because</sup> he thinks his hands are a murderer's ... and keeps washing the blood off them'(114). Secondly, the sign in the park which the Consul mis-translates as meaning 'You like this garden? Why is it yours? We evict those who destroy!'(132) recurs to express the essence of the Eden analogue (and perhaps also to suggest Faustian overtones), and it serves to enclose the relevance of the Adamic theme at the end of the novel - see also Motifs.

The mythic stature of the Consul is increased by the network of symbols which cohere around him the patterns of demonic

myth imagery. The Mexican landscape acts as an exterior correlative to his own interior sterility and confusion. The imagery of ruin obtrudes throughout the novel, mainly pivoted around the Consul himself, whose garden is overgrown, whose occult masterpiece remains unwritten, and who deteriorates in both body and soul through a nightmare of pain and confusion. The idea of a waste land is suggested from the very beginning of the book: the American highway turns into a goat track; the hotel is decayed; the jai-alai courts, overgrown. Laruelle detours homeward past the 'total wreck' of a car (perhaps the Consul's?), past the desolate railway station, and via the ruined palace of Maximilian and Carlotta. His last act in the novel is to set light to an old letter written by the Consul, reducing it to ashes. Both Eliot's *Waste Land* and Lowry's *Mexico* are areas of decay and impending social disintegration; both seem to add an extra dimensional spiritual level to 'reality'; both employ the Fisher King analogy; and perhaps, ultimately, both offer a glimmer of hope and salvation.

The patterning of the myth analogues and associated literary parallels is not without significance. In Under the Volcano Lowry successfully uses myth to impose a meaningful design on the apparent chaos of events: at the same time the emerging irony of role-reversal allows a fluidity within the structure and helps to restrain the plot from becoming a one-dimensional allegory. As a system of order the mythical and literary associations which the text generates again expand its potential meanings into a proliferation of possibilities; due to his fastidious ordering and connecting of implied mythical material, Lowry also inherently draws attention to the strict, essentially organisational, function,

(within set, if wide, parameters) to which his employment of mythical and literary examples pertains.

MYTHIC AND LITERARY ALLUSIONS - NOTES

1. - Henry James, 'Preface', The Portrait of a Lady (Harmondsworth, 1972), p.xiii.
2. - See his analysis of Chapter Ten in his letter to Cape: 'the constant repetition of churrigueresque "of an overloaded style" seemed to be a suggestion that the book was satirizing itself'. Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters (London, 1967), p.82.
3. - The idea of his modern Dante-esque trilogy, and then of his 'Proustian' novel sequence dominated much time in Lowry's thoughts. For a fuller analysis of the two projects see Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography (London, 1974), especially pp.425-8, and David Miller, Malcolm Lowry and The Voyage That Never Ends (London, 1976).
4. - Conrad Knickerbocker, 'Malcolm Lowry and the Outer Circle of Hell', in Lunar Caustic, edited by Earle Birney and Margerie Bonner Lowry (London, 1968), p.7.
5. - David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano: Myth, Symbol, Meaning (New York, 1978), p.6.
6. - See Dale Edmonds, 'Under the Volcano: A Reading of the "Immediate Level"', Tulane Studies in English, 16 (1968).
7. - Stephen Tifft, in his 'Tragedy as a Meditation on Itself: Reflexiveness in Under the Volcano' in The Art of Malcolm Lowry, edited by Anne Smith (London, 1978), speaks of 'the basic tragic shape of Under the Volcano' and then proposes to outline ways of discerning 'the novel's essential tragic principle' (p.46).

I would rather like to put forward the idea that Lowry manipulates the potentialities of tragedy as suits him in an organisational context rather than deem his novel to simply be a tragedy. In his letter to Cape Lowry writes that his book can be regarded, amongst other things, as 'hot music, a poem, a song, a tragedy, a comedy, a farce, and so forth' - see Selected Letters, p.66. Moreover, in the garden, the Consul himself seems 'aware' that the notion of 'classical' tragedy has, in some way, to be reduced, when he makes the pun: 'Katabasis to cat abysses' (140), implying also, perhaps, a loss of catharsis.

8. - Malcolm Lowry, Lunar Caustic, edited by Earle Birney and Margerie Bonner Lowry (London, 1968), p.57.

9. - Whether or not the Consul is a black magician is a question again left unanswered, yet the ambiguity once more affords Lowry the opportunity of suggesting further latent structures in his novel which the individual reader may like to explore in terms of reference to the occult. For an examination of some of the possibilities which become apparent if we regard the Consul as a black magician see The Tarot and Labyrinths below.
10. - See Betty Radice, Who's Who in the Ancient World: A Handbook to the Survivors of Greek and Roman Classics (Harmondsworth, 1973), p.179.
11. - Radice informs us that once Apollo had given Orpheus a lute 'he was able to charm wild beasts and make rocks and trees move' (ibid., p.179). In a sense then, in terms of the above Orphic comparison, Hugh could be said to also bring about Yvonne's death for, once he acquires his guitar(lute) a wild animal (the horse) is drawn towards him, and the log (tree) on which Yvonne stands is made to 'move' as she falls and is subsequently trampled.
12. - See Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.65. (In his Malcolm Lowry's Volcano, Markson parallels the twelve labours with events in Under the Volcano, pp.91-93)
13. - A full, if sometimes over-indulgent, analysis of Under the Volcano's cabbalistic possibilities, as well as a general outline of the history and structure of the Cabbala itself, is provided by Perle S. Epstein in her 'The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry: Under the Volcano and the Cabbala' (New York, 1969).
14. - The Consul's 'possible' act of murder of the German submarine officers on the s.s. Samaritan is thus given a kind of possible revenge when he is killed by pro-Nazis in the Farolito.

THE TAROT

How can I tell about it now that I have lost my power of speech, words, perhaps also memory, how can I tell what was there outside; and once I have remembered, how can I find the words to say it, and how can I utter those words? We are all trying to explain something to the others with gestures, grimaces, all of us like monkeys. Thank God, there are these cards, here on the table, a deck of tarots ...

Calvino, The Castle of Crossed Destinies.

When I interviewed Margerie Lowry I asked her about Lowry's interest in the whole field of magic, mysticism and the occult.<sup>1</sup> She was, I think rightly, reluctant to accept a



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cabbalistically dominated reading of the Volcano although <sup>she</sup> was quick to concede that Lowry had become increasingly fascinated by the occult as a means of providing his novel with yet a further type of 'ordering system' (my words). In his letter to Jonathan Cape Lowry makes a reference, with regard to Chapter Seven of his book, to 'stray cards from the Tarot pack',<sup>2</sup> and I asked Mrs. Lowry if her husband had in fact been an avid student of the Tarot? She replied that he did possess a pack of cards, which she kindly showed me, as well as one or two books on the subject.

From the evidence of Under the Volcano alone it would appear that Lowry's fascination with the Cabbalistic Tree of Life would inevitably lead him on to some kind of examination of the role the Tarot might also pertinently play in his novel in that 'the 22 Tarot trumps ... correspond to the 22 paths of the Quab-alistic Tree'.<sup>3</sup> Lowry's numerological awareness of twenty-two as the number of paths of both the Tree and the Tarot cards to which they relate becomes obliquely demonstrated when Hugh traverses a path he and Yvonne had ridden down earlier in the day, 'though there were twenty-one other paths they might have taken'(239). Kathleen Raine writing of Yeats notes that his 'allusions to certain Tarot symbols - Tower, Wheel, Magician, Chariot - are bound to strike anyone who has played at fortune-telling with Madame Sosostris' "wicked pack of cards".<sup>4</sup> Lowry was familiar with the writings of both Eliot (the Volcano borrows much more from The Waste Land than simply its Tarot references) and Yeats (one of his bed-side books was A Vision);<sup>5</sup> furthermore, his own predilection for concepts and symbols such as the Fool, the Hanged Man, the Magician,

Death, the Wheel, the Tower, the Lovers, etc. betrays definite Tarot borrowings. Raine, writing of Yeats' Tarot interests, explains that

The Central Teaching of the Golden Dawn was Cabbalism (especially the Christian cabbalism of Dee and Agrippa) with its numerology and complex system of correspondences based on the diagram of the Tree of Life; the Tarot was used in this sense, according to Eliphas Levi's view that these cards represent the Tree of Life in a pictorial form. <sup>6</sup>

For Lowry, and his overwhelming obsession with symbols, any form of 'pictorial' representation of a useful symbol would undoubtedly be worth pursuing, especially, as is the case with the Tarot, if the anterior representation carried with it a host of iconographical meanings. Also, in the sense in which it might be difficult, in a work of fiction at least, to provide adequate 'visual' imagery for esoteric magical and mystical concepts, the Tarot cards offer a ready-made constant acting as a stabilising factor when they are returned to again and again, albeit in varying contexts. For example, even without Tarotistic reference, Laruelle might just be regarded as a sort of hermit though if we place the Hermit card's associations on his shoulders some of his actions and the way he is described become clarified within a larger framework or pattern. A similar principle applies in an even more revealing way to the Consul in that he can be profitably compared with characters and situations from many different cards.

Numerology, Tarot 'games' and fortune telling, once a basic Tarot connection has been established, allow Lowry the

possibility of enlarging his text into even more speculative territory. He was particularly fond (as I hope most of this study will demonstrate) of constructing vast super-structures of correspondences which possess only tentative, or as is the case with the Tarot, almost disguised foundations in the actual body of the book. A Tarotistic analysis of Under the Volcano must be made without the citation of even a single direct reference to the word 'Tarot' in the entire novel. For serious Tarot scholars the world in some way 'relates' to the system portrayed on the various cards though the world itself is largely unaware of that relationship; a similar mystical correlation perhaps applies to the Tarot's relationship to the world of Under the Volcano.

Ellen McDaniel, writing of John Fowles' novel The Magus, begins her Tarotistic analysis by discussing 'archetypal quest[s]' common to much literature of all ages; she cites, in an example pertinent to Under the Volcano, that 'Dante ... in his quest, must descend to confront all the demons and monsters of history'.<sup>7</sup> A basic quest structure informs both Lowry's novel and the pattern in which the Tarot cards are laid out which is that of a figure 8 on its side, or the mathematical symbol of infinity.

McDaniel posits Nicholas Urfe, the hero (or anti-hero) of Fowles' novel as the Tarot Fool, its principal figure 'who must travel the circuit of the cards through a calibrated progression out of ignorance and frivolity into enlightenment'.<sup>8</sup> In terms of Under the Volcano the Consul too can be favourably compared with the Fool (see below) yet this is not his only Tarot role (in The Magus Conchis assumes the guise of the Black Magician whilst in Under the

Volcano Firmin is both Fool and Black Magician). (Similarly, in terms of a Dante-esque comparison, Firmin does not simply become the Dante of the Modern Inferno but also many of the figures encountered 'en route'.) Moreover, the 'calibrated progression' of which McDaniel speaks is also, with one possible notable exception (see below), largely ignored by Lowry. In the Volcano Tarot images drawn from various phases and stages of its implied quest proliferate out of their logical and ordained sequence. Also, many of the twenty-two Tarot trumps or 'picture' cards are largely (if not totally) completely forgotten or rejected by Lowry's treatment.

As stated the cards are dealt appropriately into their interlocked circles, their figure 8 on its side, and they overlap at card ten, the Wheel of Fortune. The first circuit, beginning with the Fool and ending with the Wheel represents the solar (or progressive) phase, whilst the second circuit beginning with Fortitude and ending with the World represents the lunar (or regressive) phase. Lowry places his own Ferris Wheel at various points in his text yet it assumes a domineering presence in the centre of his action at the fairground scene in Chapter Seven. Lowry's statement that from the next chapter 'the book, so to speak, goes into reverse',<sup>9</sup> may also suggest that he has taken the designated Tarot sequence and employed it in a basic way to enhance the lay-out of his novel. Indeed Lowry's claims that his book should be regarded as cyclical (see Wheels) again becomes reinforced by the infinite and overlapping Tarot sequence itself, especially if we regard Chapter One as representing the true 'culmination' of the lunar phase in that it brings us back to the Wheel and thus,

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logically and effortlessly, onto a new progression; and indeed the chapter ends with a brief description of the 'luminous wheel'(47) revolving backwards. As such the never-ending sequence of the major arcana becomes reflected in the never-ending 'spatial' design Lowry imposes upon his own narrative.

In his letter to Cape Lowry makes his reference to stray cards from the Tarot pack cropping up in Chapter Seven of his novel and here, perhaps, five cards 'appear' in their ordained sequence within a short space of time. The cards are those numbered nine - thirteen: the Hermit, the Wheel of Fortune, Fortitude, the Hanged Man, and Death. 'The Hermit describes the process of self-examination which will follow if the promptings of conscience are heeded',<sup>10</sup> and Laruelle, as potential Hermit (see below), significantly confronts the Consul with words of warning relating to the 'damage' (220) Firmin has done to both Yvonne's life and his own. Laruelle's words are largely unheeded by Geoffrey and he detaches himself from the situation in order to stare dreamily at the 'Ferris wheel near them'(221). The next card in the sequence, Fortitude, is represented by a person 'grasp[ing] the jaws of a powerful lion',<sup>11</sup> and represents the conflicts within the individual as he shirks off the mistakes of the past and attempts to 'reunite the conscious mind with the long-lost paths to the inner centre'.<sup>12</sup> The Consul had spoken to Laruelle of his 'battle for the survival of the human consciousness'(221), of his desire to go his own way irrespective of where it will ultimately lead him. Appropriately, as he reels around the fairground, he passes 'the shabby little closed British Consulate, where the lion [my italics] and the unicorn on the faded

blue shield regarded him mournfully'(223); his consular activity having ended Firmin is now rendered as metaphorically free to pursue his own destiny. Within the immediate context of Chapter Seven that destiny consists of him taking a ride on the 'MAQUINA INFERNAL'(224) where, hanging upside down, 'with only a scrap of woven wire between himself and death [my italics] (225), he assumes the posture of the Tarot's Hanged Man (see below). Finally Death rears its head many times in the closing pages of the chapter, as it does throughout the novel, for example, when Firmin sees 'a huge turtle dying in two parallel streams of blood'(228) - his and Yvonne's paths on the Day of the Dead are also 'parallel' and will, in due course, converge 'in blood'; when he hears a voice in the cantina telling him 'what it is like to die'(229); and, finally, when he reads the newspaper headline informing him that the Pope's death, like his own, is 'inevitable'(233).

Lowry would appear to employ the designated sequence of the Tarot only once in his novel possibly to chart a 'fulcrum' (the Tarot's turning point, the cross-over of the figure eight shape) within the logical context of his own narrative progression. Elsewhere in the novel Tarot cards tend to appear or proliferate outside any pre-ordained sequence; indeed the sense of order the cards generate within the novel becomes, perhaps finally, germane only to Lowry's placement and manipulation of them and not to any accessible ulterior Tarotistic design.

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frequently makes ingenious use of the two dialectical possibilities attributed to any given card within a viable framework in terms of his own fiction. A dilemma facing the Tarotistically-conscious reader of the Volcano is to what extent should he 'believe' Firmin's own knowledge, or at least 'awareness', of the occult? If the Consul, within the context of Lowry's delineation of him in Under the Volcano (which is, after all, the only real delineation we have, even though he is discussed in Lowry letters) is regarded as in some way an expert of sorts on the Tarot then some of his most negative actions ironically carry with them a Tarotistic positive counter-balance; and, in a way, make them justifiable within the pattern or framework of his own personal quest for transcendence, inner harmony, divine knowledge, etc. (Some of the ramifications of this are examined below.)

I will now work through the cards, within their pre-designated sequence (for convenience) pausing to underline or suggest any connections their symbolism might have with Lowry's novel. Much of the material may appear conjectural and tentative yet, as stated above, the secretive concealment of meanings from the Tarot in the novel openly reflects the air of secrecy and obtuseness which the cards themselves inherently possess.

One of the most blatant and obvious Tarot analogies incorporated into Under the Volcano is that relating the Consul to the divine Fool, the unnumbered card in the pack. Literary analogies between the Consul and 'fools' Don Quixote and Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin in The Idiot establish Firmin as an archetypal fool; details from the Tarot card pertaining to his

condition greatly strengthen this guise. Raine describes the Tarot fool as follows:

Le Mat, the fool, the zero of the pack, to whom no number is assigned; perhaps the motley-clad joker of the familiar deck of playing cards. The neophyte of the Order of the Golden Dawn was assigned the number 0 = 0; which by implication identifies the uninitiated man with the Tarot's Fool. He carries a wallet and a staff, his clothes are ragged, and a dog or other animal is attacking him from behind .... In Waite's pack the Foolish Man is represented as a dreamer, who, about to step over the precipice of the world, carries a white rose in his hand. 13

The Consul too carries a 'stick'(192), one of the objects returned to him after his ride on the Infernal Machine is his 'notecase'(226) and, until he has his change of clothes in Chapter Six at least, his appearance must also have assumed a ragged air. As potential, if 'desperate neophyte'(94) the Consul too shares with the Fool the plight of the uninitiated attempting to gain a foothold on the slippery and difficult path up the Cabbalistic Tree. The dog which persistently attacks the Fool from behind is of course present in the novel in the shape of 'the pariahs ... those dreadful creatures that seemed to shadow [the Consul] everywhere'(110). A dog follows Firmin down the ravine as he is metaphorically made to step over the precipice for which he has been obliviously heading throughout the final day.

Lind explains the significance of the term 'Mat' applied to the Fool as 'an Arabic word, meaning "a dead person". Gerard Reynberg thinks this name has been given to the Fool as one who is dead to reason. However, it could also refer to one who is dead to

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this world'.<sup>14</sup> In terms of Under the Volcano the Consul could be said to be both dead to reason as well as dead to the world; very early in Chapter One we are already made to realise that he is dead, whilst Chapters Two - Twelve constantly pre-empt the moment when we evince his death; a death which is, moreover, brought about by Firmin's own obstinacy and unreasonableness. Douglas also characterises the Fool as the 'Green Man, the harbinger of a new cycle of existence, the herald of new life and fresh beginnings',<sup>15</sup> and this is the role which becomes attributed to the Consul through death in that his murder takes on some attributes of a pagan sacrifice to the gods of fertility (see Wheels, Circles, Cycles); moreover, the novel's own cyclic form implicitly suggests that a new cycle of existence becomes, in a way, 're-born' every time we re-read it. (In the sequence of the Tarot's major arcana the Fool, as first card, is placed next to the World, the last card, in order to suggest an infinite and closed cycle; appropriately, Lowry both ends Under the Volcano with an image of 'the world itself'(375) and also begins it with a description of the spinning globe.)

Having designated the Fool as the first of many Tarot roles the Consul plays Lowry possibly casts Hugh as the Juggler, the first card proper of the sequence. It is with the Juggler that the quest really begins and Hugh (like the Consul) appears constantly engaged on some sort of search for his own identity. Now casts the Consul as a 'Fisher King figure [with] all the other main characters ... as questers', yet goes on to say that 'All of them are ineffectual, because they focus not really on the Consul but on themselves'.<sup>16</sup> The Juggler is a young man who wears a 'wide brimmed hat' and 'is depicted with a girdle round his waist ... the

Zoroastrian symbol of dualism'.<sup>17</sup> Hugh arrives in Quahnahuac wearing a 'ten-gallon Stetson'(99) and 'two belts'(99), one to hold his trousers up, the other to support his holster. This ambiguous comic/serious detail of Hugh's dress reinforces a picture of his role throughout the Volcano: a role which evinces him as serious in his intent to change the world yet simultaneously comic in the way in which he attempts to set about doing so. Indeed, ultimately, Hugh perhaps suffers from 'Weakness of will, failure of nerve, timidity and hesitation ... [and] an inability to face reality',<sup>18</sup> - all the negative aspects which the 'aura' of the Juggler card generates.

The spiritual enlightenment offered by the Tarot's third card, the Papess or High Priestess, would appear as largely absent from Yvonne's character; moreover, the pictorial circumstances appertaining to the card would also appear absent from any of the details of Under the Volcano. Therefore one must, I think, assume that the card is largely one omitted from Lowry's schemata. (Although it perhaps would have been apposite to designate the Consul as Fool, Hugh as Juggler, and Yvonne as High Priestess, Lowry's Tarot borrowings tend to function only when he appears certain of being able to pursue analogies through a number of thematically consistent levels; admittedly he could easily have thrown in a reference or two to Yvonne as High Priestess yet the thematic reverberations throughout the text which a number of the other cards possess would have, nonetheless, in such an instance, remained largely absent; and, as such, like a good card player he discriminately discards those elements of the pack which in no way

further his 'play'.) Lowry turns instead to the Empress, the next card, as a more favourable depository of meaning in accounting for some of his descriptions of Yvonne's character and actions.

The Consul and Yvonne can be compared to cards III and IV of the major arcana - the Empress and Emperor. Such a comparison is reinforced by Lowry when he draws a parallel between their condition and that of the Emperor Maximilian and the Empress Carlotta, 'the two lonely empurpled exiles'(20) who also lived in Quahnahuac (in the nineteenth century) and 'whose only majesty at last [was] that of tragedy'(20). The emperor's symbol is the eagle and the name Quanhahuas means 'where the eagle stops'(49). Lind characterises him as bearded, and the Consul too is rendered by Lowry as having a beard, whilst Douglas terms him as 'Mythologically ... a descendant of [many] father figures',<sup>19</sup> and Firmin too is frequently alluded to as a sort of surrogate father figure (indeed in preliminary versions of the novel Geoffrey was Yvonne's father and not her husband).<sup>20</sup> Finally the emperor is depicted as sitting in a 'barren land which ... suggests sterility',<sup>21</sup> and this aspect of the card pertains to its negative divinatory meaning of 'loss of an influential position [and] failure of ambition'.<sup>22</sup> The Consul too, of course, has lost his own influential position of Consul (just as Maximilian was deprived of his emperorhood) whilst his failure of ambition, in relation to his unwritten occult masterpiece, for example, is a theme which dominates the novel; images of barrenness and sterility inform, in a variety of different ways, nearly every page of the text.

Whilst the Consul assumes some of the attributes of the

Tarot emperor, Yvonne bears an even closer relationship to the Empress. (The fact that male Tarot characters outnumber female ones means that Lowry can spread his Consul comparisons over a number of different cards whilst Yvonne's Tarotistic role can become concentrated through only a handful of the system's archetypes.) Lind describes the Empress card as follows:

[She] holds in her right hand, a sceptre; wears a crown jewelled with stars. In the foreground, at her feet, is a field of corn; lying on which, at her right side, is a shield marked with the symbol of Venus .... Sometimes an eagle is shown on her shield, the bird sacred to Zeus; her crown with its shining orbs is another link with the region of the upper air ... She is, in short, universal fecundity. 23

The Empress' crown jewelled with stars, in terms of her relationship to the region of the upper air, becomes manifested in Under the Volcano in Yvonne's interest in astronomy. The symbol of Venus attached to the card is a symbol Lowry also employs for Yvonne who is described as 'a honey-tanned Venus' (263). The eagle depicted on the shield appears in the text as the eagle Yvonne frees from its cage and which flew 'up soaring, with a sudden cleaving of pinions into the deep dark blue pure sky above, in which at that moment appeared one star'(321). Finally 'universal fecundity' perhaps becomes ironically manipulated by nature of the fact that the three male protagonists of the Volcano have all, at some stage, been Yvonne's lovers.

Although Lowry refers to the figure of the Pope in Under the Volcano (the real Pope), in terms of his imminent death,

which he inexorably links to the imminent death of the Consul, the Pope or Hierophant card of the pack would not appear to be one which he employs with any great degree of exactitude. The Pope wears a glove imprinted with a small Maltese cross which is emblematic of purity and honesty; at one point Firmin recalls how an old beggar had taken him for Christ 'and falling down on his knees before him had pinned swiftly under his coat lapel two medallions'(204); and so, as Christ figure of sorts, Firmin possibly also implicitly shares some of the virtues of the Tarot's Pope. Rather it is to the next card in the sequence - the Lovers, that Lowry turns for slightly more detailed Tarotistic manipulation. Lind says that the card 'very definitely lays stress upon the choice each of us has of taking one of two divergent paths, one to the right and the other to the left';<sup>24</sup> and here again then we are back in the heart of Lowry's material and the key scene in Chapter Eleven when Hugh and Yvonne choose the wrong path to Parian. Moreover, in support of his Tarot analogy, Lowry makes Hugh and Yvonne past lovers; and indeed, he reinforces a notion of them as present lovers of sorts by allowing them to spend much of the day together. In an earlier version of the novel he actually ended the penultimate chapter, not with Yvonne's death, but with a love scene between the two (see below).

Gray observes that in the Waite pack 'the Lovers are represented by nude male and female figures to the right and left of the frame respectively. Behind the male is a Tree of Light bearing twelve flames, and behind the female is a Tree of Knowledge with four fruit and a serpent coiled three times round the trunk'.<sup>25</sup> Such details, of course, confirm and support many of the

undercurrents operating throughout Under the Volcano in relation to the mythic 'frame' of Edenic and Cabbalistic reference. Hugh, either consciously or not, rejects the path of the Tree of Light, the one the Consul has followed to the little lighthouse, and assumes the guise of the tempting serpent luring Yvonne/Eve to eat of the Tree of Knowledge and thus bring about the Fall of man (Everyman, Adam, the Consul). The reversed meaning of the Lovers Tarot card thus comes directly into play in the all-embracing finale of Lowry's novel and gives further elaboration to a host of cross-referential materials meticulously established throughout; Douglas characterises it as follows:

When reversed, it shows one who vacillates between two courses of action, unable to decide which to choose and evading the issue until the pressure of events - whether physical or psychological - forces him one way or the other. Until this happens he wastes time and energy fruitlessly searching for a compromise, unable to give up either of the attractive alternatives before him.<sup>26</sup>

Throughout his life it appears that Hugh has constantly vacillated between two courses of action seeking forever to evade the issue at hand; and, by extension, the same could be said of Yvonne. In terms of the penultimate chapter of Under the Volcano finding the Consul still remains an attractive, 'heroic' alternative of sorts but dallying and wasting time in each other's company would seem, for Hugh and Yvonne, an alternative equally as attractive. Day says that 'As the day wears on, Hugh and Yvonne often seem more interested in one another than the fate of the Consul' adding, by way of summarising Chapter Eleven, that 'after Geoffrey has limped out of the Salon Ofelia toward Parian and the



Farolito, they do a truly sorry job of looking for him - getting drunk themselves, setting caged eagles free, buying guitars; acting, in short, more like a pair of tourists than people hurrying to save a man's life'.<sup>27</sup>

The seventh card (the Chariot) is again not actively explored in Lowry's treatment (although the number seven itself is of prime importance to the novel, and thus some of its numerological significance becomes traceable back to the manifold occult associations the card's number generates - see Numbers): nor again, on a direct level, is the eighth card, the Balance or Scales, overtly employed, although the novel as a whole thrives on notions of equilibrium, dialectic, duality and ambivalence.<sup>28</sup> As potential Hermit, Laruelle is made to extract some meaning from the ninth card of the arcana and he brings to an end most, if not all, of the Tarot's remaining human cards overtly relating to anyone else in the novel except the Consul.

The Hermit is shown 'represented as a solitary old man ... trudging along a dark and lonely road':<sup>29</sup> admittedly, Laruelle is not yet an 'old' man although in Chapter One he is certainly solitary, and his isolation is reinforced with the realisation that he is the only survivor of the previous year's Day of the Dead. The Hermit carries a 'lantern' in his right hand and a 'heavy staff'<sup>30</sup> in his left, whilst Laruelle wanders around Quahnahuac looking like 'a knight of old, with tennis racket for shield and pocket torch for scrip "dreaming" of battles [in which] the soul [had] survived to wander'(18). The path on which the Hermit walks is one of

individuality and, in this sense, the isolated 'path' taken by the Consul throughout his final day could also entail his role as being similar to the Hermit's; nevertheless, Firmin himself only occasionally achieves a 'standing apart from the action'<sup>31</sup> which Gray emphasises as fundamental in the card's meaning. Laruelle, on the other hand, ideally fits into Gray's description of the Hermit as one who 'must undergo an experience, and then "think it out" afterwards from an overlooking point of time'.<sup>32</sup> Indeed Douglas personifies the figure as 'the teacher who points out the thread of meaning that is woven into the apparent chaos of life',<sup>33</sup> which again typifies Laruelle's role as, in a way, that of the entire novel's controlling or organising consciousness; furthermore, Jacques' tower provides him with a ready made 'overlooking point' from which, as artist, he can impersonally survey the action. As potential film-maker of the day's events, Laruelle, as Hermit, also benefits from the 'flickering of the inward light',<sup>34</sup> of his lantern - the bulb in the projector allowing his film to be shown. (The lights of Bustamente's cinema fail but the power returns just before Chapter One ends, and the remainder of the novel begins.)

Card X, the Wheel of Fortune, 'has been referred to that of Ixion, the circle of the Zodiac, and the restless round of man's innumerable lives; the ups-and-downs of earthly existence, resulting from the working out of Karmic consequences'.<sup>35</sup> The symbol of the Wheel of course occupies a central position within the whole framework of Under the Volcano, so much so that I have devoted a chapter to explicating some of its usages as a distinct and important ordering system in its own right. Suffice to note here

then that the Tarot Wheel of Fortune is one of the most significant images from the arcana to be explored by Lowry in that with it he greatly expands upon its basic Tarot associations, supporting the card's meanings with a host of other related concerns. Gray compares the Tarot wheel to a

Drum of Destiny into which all living entities are thrown like lottery tickets and spun round together in their various worlds and orbits until they either make sense of each other and allot themselves to their proper categories of consciousness and Cosmos - or lose their chances of life so often that they are eventually eliminated altogether. 36

Concepts of fate, fortune and destiny underlie much of the action of the novel; the characters are inexorably led on to fulfil their individual pre-ordained lots and thus bring their wheels full circle. In Chapter Eleven Yvonne notices on a restaurant menu 'a design like a small wheel round the inside of which was written "Lotería Nacional Para La Beneficencia Pública", making another circular frame, within which appeared a sort of trade or hallmark representing a happy mother caressing her child'(330). Yvonne's own child (appropriately named Geoffrey) is dead; she can neither assume the happiness of motherhood nor the happiness of a reconciliation with the Consul and an escape to the northern Paradise of her dreams; instead for her the Wheel of Fortune is turning rapidly and her fate awaits her. Lowry makes Yvonne and the Consul 'lose their chances of life so often', to use Gray's phrase, that the Drum of Destiny eventually crushes and annihilates them. (Appropriately the nineteenth card of the Tarot, the Sun, depicts a child on a white horse, the child representing the upright meaning of a new lease of

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life and a return to 'health', the horse, loss, guilt, reproach for wasted opportunities and punishment for failure. At the end of his novel Lowry purposely denies Yvonne the Sun's potential for inner 'illumination' instead rendering its warning unheeded and also, simultaneously, neatly fulfilling its negative equine meaning on a very real level. To observe that in the first paragraph of his novel that Lowry had placed Quahnahuac on the nineteenth parallel on the same latitude as 'Juggernaut in India, on the Bay of Bengal'(9); realise that at Juggernaut wives were cremated, at sunset, with their husbands; and also notice that the negative aspect of the Tarot's Sun card, its nineteenth, is made to enhance the scenario is to grant either Lowry, or ourselves, virtually super-human 'organisational' powers!) In Chapter Eleven of Under the Volcano the Wheel of Fortune is, for Yvonne, rapidly spinning towards negative ends; the 'sinister' left side of the menu she peruses is taken up with a picture of a woman: 'with one hand she was beckoning roguishly, while with the other she held up a block of ten lottery tickets, on each of which a cowgirl was riding a bucking horse'(330). Ten is the number of the Wheel of Fortune card, whilst the bucking horse becomes suggested as the fateful 'ticket' Yvonne has drawn from life's spinning lottery drum. Douglas characterises the reversed meaning of the Wheel card in the following terms:

Unable to learn from his mistakes, [the person] travels on, sure in his own mind that his troubles are temporary and soon to be solved through his own efforts and a little luck. He is the constant prey of whatever the fates have in store for him... 37

In terms of Under the Volcano all the major protagonists appear to

travel on obliviously, unaware of whatever the fates have in store for them. McDaniel writes that 'the Tarot Wheel of Fortune never actually comes to rest. This precarious wheel never stabilises at its apex but always descends again, plummeting the Fool into a new adversity or dilemma which must be understood, or at least assimilated, before the wheel can turn upward once more'.<sup>38</sup> The Consul as, amongst other things, Tarot Fool indeed takes his symbolic ride on the looping-the-loop machine and thereafter 'descends' towards his nemesis; nonetheless as possible, if inebriate, initiate of some kind of self-imposed Order (the pun is apposite) his fall must, I think, never be taken as simply negative: after his ride on the machine Firmin has understood and assimilated his condition and, for him at least, his final 'choice of path' is the right one (indeed in the forest clearing outside the Salon Ofelia it is the right-hand route which he takes).

As stated earlier, at the cross-over point of the figure of eight design into which the Tarot cards are traditionally placed the Wheel of Fortune becomes overlaid by the final card, the World. The globe's gyration appropriately relates directly to the Tarot's notion of never-ending patterns of cosmic cyclicity over which the individual has no immediate control, and the Wheel represents the various revolutions inherent to the natural world: 'Everything in the cosmos is revolving, as it were, like a wheel: the stars in their courses, the seasons of the year, and the change from day to night and night to day'.<sup>39</sup> Lowry's novel is also eager to stress the innumerable cyclic patterns of the universe, the year (with its Zodiacal twelve months), and the day and the night (each of which traditionally comprise ~~of~~ twelve hours), becoming minutely and

closely referenced to the time structures on which the Volcano (with its twelve chapters) operates. In her study of the Tarot's influence on Yeats Raine discusses the Wheel card's associations as follows:

The concept of the Wheel of the hells and the heavens through which all souls must travel is most highly developed in Buddhism, but it is common, in some form, to all religions. Dante's ascent of the Mountain from the hells, through purgatory, to the heavens is a Christian equivalent of the Buddhist Wheel; as are Swedenborg's and Blake's 'states' which the soul 'explores'. To the same symbol we must assign the 'gyring, spiring, 'Day of the Serpent' which in the Cabbalistic Tree of Life passes in succession through the mansions or stations of the twenty-two paths of the Tarot .... The spires of that Serpent must certainly be among the many sources of Yeats's image of the Wheel not as circular but as a spiral revolution, the gyres. <sup>40</sup>

These larger concerns which the Tarot's Wheel card 'generates', are, of course, also highly significant to Under the Volcano: a basic Dante-esque structure permeates the novel; in his letter to Cape Lowry terms his Ferris Wheel 'Buddha's wheel of the law';<sup>41</sup> both 'Blake' and 'Swedenborg' (42) are mentioned by the Consul in his letter, where he also invokes the image of a 'great wheel'(43); whilst, finally, the spirallings littered throughout the text (see Labyrinths) also betray Lowry's expansion of the Wheel symbol into the Yeatsian territory of the gyre.

Lowry does not really explore the possibilities of the next card in the sequence, Fortitude, with the exception of briefly aligning it into a sequence of cards employed chronologically in Chapter Seven (and discussed above). He does, however, extract some

interesting material from the twelfth card, the Hanged Man. The card depicts a 'figure ... suspended by the left foot [so that he hangs] upside-down';<sup>42</sup> and the Consul, of course, is to be found in a suspended or hanging position when he takes his ride on the looping-the-loop machine.<sup>43</sup> Douglas writes that 'the Hanged Man illustrates one who has taken his life in his hands and cast himself head first into the depths. His action has not been foolhardy, however, for he hangs safely suspended by the knot of his own faith';<sup>44</sup> The Consul had talked to Laruelle of the 'greatness of [his] battle'(222), and, as he whirls around, muses 'that he was without physical fear of death'(225). For Firmin, his experience on the contraption confirms that the route he had chosen is the right one irrespective of the outcome. Lind observes that

While the right leg of the Hanged Man, bent behind the left, forms a cross; his arms folded behind his back, together with his head, form a triangle with the point downwards. The cross indicates suffering (which is here self-imposed); and the triangle (the divine spirit in man).<sup>45</sup>

Firmin's tribulations on the machine are also self-imposed yet, significantly, he conceives of the experience as 'another example of Jacques's ... unnecessary suffering'(225), the point being that Firmin regards his ride, his suffering, as in some way necessary to the pursuit of his quest; and, indeed, he takes 'a kind of fierce delight in [the] final acceptance'(226) that his old existence has been lost or thrown off rendering him free to realise his divine or transcendental potential.<sup>46</sup> The crosslike shape the Hanged Man assumes, together with his suffering which brings about transcendence, must necessarily recall Christ's crucifixion; indeed much of the



card's symbolism derives from the Christian archetype. One of the major myth analogues employed to chart the Consul's condition throughout Under the Volcano is the Christ parallel and Geoffrey's actions on the Day of the Dead frequently mimic many of the events in Christ's life prior to the crucifixion. Minutes before he steps onto the machine the Consul notices 'a man near them [he and Laruelle] standing on a step-ladder nailing a board to a tree'(222); as he leaves the Frenchman Firmin observes that now 'The man had nailed his board to the tree'(222); furthermore, the machine itself is rendered as 'obscured by a tree'(224), another name for the Hanged Man's frame being the 'gallows-tree'.<sup>47</sup> (The symbol of the cross pursues Firmin for much of the remainder of his life until he becomes metaphorically crucified in the Farolito.)

The Hanged Man card is numbered twelve, whilst Firmin's encounter with the machine occupies twelve minutes of the novel's time-span as demonstrated by the two time checks given, one before, the other after the ride: 'five to two'(223) and 'seven minutes past two'(227). Lowry probably intends the twelve minutes to act as a microcosmic representation of the twelve hours in which the book (or at least Chapters Two - Twelve) is set. Moreover, as suggested earlier, the machine offers a suitable venue at which to chart a number of turning points in the Consul's quest or search for enlightenment. Lind writes that 'the side posts of the gibbet [depicted on the card] have each six lopped branches along their length',<sup>48</sup> one set of six depicting the completion of the sun's cycle through half the signs of the Zodiac, the other six heralding the moon's cycle through the remaining six signs. In terms of Under the Volcano, if we regard Chapter One as completing the lunar cycle,

the Hanged Man card again demonstrates the poised suspended position of the narrative at the point at which the Consul rides the Infernal Machine. Markson writes that 'An elusive relationship may well exist between all twelve of the signs [of the Zodiac] and Lowry's twelve chapters - or an all too obvious one'<sup>49</sup> (see Numbers for some speculation as to what this relationship might be); suffice to say here that Lowry plays with aspects of the Zodiacal correlation the Hanged Man card offers by neatly dividing his material into two counterbalanced six-sectioned halves.

In that the action of Under the Volcano continually charts a steady progress towards the death of two of its protagonists, the Tarot Death card (number XIII) is one to which Lowry cannot really help himself alluding. The card depicts:

An animated human skeleton, armed with a large scythe, [who] is mowing a field of fertile black earth. His crop is not corn but human bodies, bits of which can be seen scattered at his feet. Two decapitated heads, one crowned, are shown; their eyes open and their flesh apparently firm.<sup>50</sup>

Lowry chooses to set the action of his novel on the Mexican Day of the Dead when the dead are traditionally claimed to commune with the living. Festive symbols of 'chocolate stalls ... chocolate skeletons ... [even] yes [chocolate] funeral wagons'(339) are to be seen, and eaten, everywhere. At the Farolito the sinister old woman with the dominoes reappears and takes 'from her shawl a clockwork skeleton'(368) which she sets in motion on the bar in front of the Consul; slightly earlier Firmin had observed several

ominous figures 'dressed in long black cloaks streaked with luminous paint to represent skeletons'(360). The card's 'human skeleton' thus becomes overtly represented in the novel by humans dressed in skeleton costumes. The volcanic terrain of the Quahnahuac region has, appropriately, 'black earth' (241, 321), whilst Lowry also frequently alludes to the apparatus of reaping and mowing (the death card is also known as the Reaper) in the shape of 'plough[s]'(15), 'ploughshares'(318) and 'pitchfork[s]'(10, 338). Gray characterises the card slightly differently as depicting both 'the conventional black panoplied skeletal rider on a white horse' moving towards 'the edge of the fatal Abyss into which all souls must drift or fall';<sup>51</sup> these details are also of obvious relevance to the respective deaths of Yvonne and the Consul.

The Tarot's fourteenth card, Temperance, is of some interest in that it relates to the pouring of water from one cup into a wine cup held in the other hand; also known as the Angel of Time, the card depicts 'a great Angelic Figure of asexual aspect poised between land and water in the act of pouring water into a wine cup'.<sup>52</sup> The water being poured acts both as 'a libation and a purificatory stream' whilst the wine represents 'pure Wisdom',<sup>53</sup> which most humans cannot (or rather should not) attempt to 'drink' without dilution. The Consul, of course, symbolically rejects attempts at purification through the life-force of water; instead he slakes his thirst, more often than not, with pure alcohol; moreover, he appears to equate his literal thirst with a 'thirst' for knowledge or experience (as such the Faust archetype fits his predicament rather well, his drinking acting as the Mephistopheles to which he sells his soul). The message of the Tarot card calls for moderation in that:

Wisdom is the strongest Wine of all. God help those who over-imbibe it into systems unable to mediate its influence. To them it can be the most powerful prison they are likely to encounter. Ultimately they may destroy themselves on this account, but seldom before they have done a considerable amount of damage all around them. Let the havoc wrought by an ordinarily violent and disgustingly drunken human in terms of mess, mayhem, and murder be imagined, then projected into Inner parallel states, and some idea may be had of the danger-liability from intoxication. 54

The Consul's actual continual state of drunkenness reflects rather well on the Tarot's metaphorical employment of drunkenness to demonstrate the abuse of wisdom. In a letter written in 1950 Lowry states that 'Mystically speaking, the abuse of wine is connected with the abuse of mystical powers',<sup>55</sup> the Consul's mystical abuse of alcohol therefore parallels the Tarot's warning that alcoholism destroys or perverts magical knowledge. Indeed it could be argued that the Consul's unwritten occult masterpiece - 'Secret Knowledge' (45) - remains unwritten precisely because of his continuous state of inebriation; nevertheless, on the other hand, one could say that Firmin's exceptional alcohol capacity also implies, in the present context, that he can cope with the excess of 'wisdom' with which his drinking provides him. Although Geoffrey does eventually destroy himself the virtually endless hallucinatory 'trip' which coincides with his demise perhaps renders the danger-liability worthwhile.

In Chapter Four Hugh speculates 'with almost avuncular relish' that maybe his half-brother is 'a black magician'(122). The extent of Firmin's knowledge of the black arts remains one of the great enigmas of Under the Volcano; although it is quite easy to establish a host of occult references throughout the novel it is

far more difficult to determine how many of these become, in some mystical way, actually emanated by the Consul himself.<sup>57</sup> However, as potential black magician, the Consul shares, or is made to share, a number of parallels with the Tarot's Black Magician or Devil card:

Upon this Tarot card the Devil is standing on a small circular pedestal, a sort of mock throne. His hands are held in the opposite position from those of the Juggler; the left one is lowered, the right held up as if reversing the Pope's gesture of benediction. He holds in his left hand a flaming torch; has ribbed wings similar to those of a bat, claw-like feet, and on either side of his cap jut out jagged horns. <sup>58</sup>

Admittedly, these bizarre details of the Black Magician's appearance would not seem to be immediately relevant to the Consul, though with some manipulation some can be rendered applicable, for example, in Chapter Six the Consul asks Hugh: 'But did you know that no angel with six wings is ever transformed'(193), an allusion perhaps to the Inferno where Satan beats his own wings (and an inference, in terms of the Volcano that the Consul, as devil, will also not allow himself to be 'transformed'); the Black Magician's 'flaming torch' could, in a sense, be compared to the constant glass or bottle of alcohol the Consul holds and with which he 'burns' himself; the horns of the Devil's cap become manipulated into the horned cap which Firmin also frequently 'wears' and which enables him to be branded as both cuckold and scapegoat. B.W. Martin writes that the horned god was the leader of 'fertility cults whose meetings formed the basis for the supposed organized system of ritual witchcraft [and] usually included worship of such a god or symbol, personified by the leader of the group'.<sup>59</sup> Admittedly, the Consul does not appear to be the

leader of a witches' coven, yet, interestingly, many of his actions towards the end of the Day of the Dead can be easily manipulated into conforming to a pattern of a witches' coven, with its celebration of the black mass. Basically, a black mass consists of perverted and obscene parody of the constituent rituals of the Christian mass and centres on the three 'ritualised' acts of: firstly, defecation; secondly, sexual intercourse; and thirdly, blood sacrifice. These three areas of endeavour, as it were, are all present in the latter stages of Lowry's novel: the Consul defecates at the Salon Ofelia, he has intercourse with Maria at the Farolito, and, finally, his own death takes on a wealth of 'sacrificial' overtones.<sup>60</sup> As 'celebrant' of the mass Firmin's ritualised intercourse with the prostitute carries with it, in terms of his Christ analogue, associations of the highest of perversions - Maria becomes, in a sense, representative of the Virgin Mary and thus the Consul's act symbolically entails, or implies, both the deflowering of virginity and maternal incest - elements of the witches' coven taken from the perversion of the Christ parallel. The police chiefs' taunts to the Consul (in broken English) of 'anarchist' become (appropriately) rendered as 'antichrista' (370) for Firmin has metaphorically fulfilled his role of Devil or anti-Christ; and, again appropriately, as soon as he leaves Maria, he is confronted with the number '666' (352), that assigned to the Beast in the Book of Revelations (see also Numbers).

Having rather meticulously established close identification between the Consul and the Black Magician or Devil, Lowry does little else with the card (indeed the Consul's satanic aspects are drawn from various aspects of the occult in general, not simply from the

Tarot analogy). As everyman figure, however, Firmin occupies a position in the spectrum somewhere between both Christ and Satan (a large spectrum!), Lowry's satanic comparisons juxtaposing and contradicting the Consul's Messianic role and drawing attention to the imprecise shading of his moral (or immoral) stance, which falls, ambiguously, somewhere between the two archetypal extremes.

The Tarot card number sixteen, the Lightning-Struck Tower, is one which Lowry alludes to in a variety of ways throughout Under the Volcano. Basically the card depicts 'A sturdy tower, erected on a grassy rise [which] is struck by lightning. The constellated top of the tower is lifted by the blast and fire strikes deep within ... Two human figures fall headlong from their stricken refuge'.<sup>61</sup> On an immediate level the card's two plummeting figures become represented (in death) by the Consul and Yvonne, both of whom have sought refuge of various kinds throughout their final day, frequently in actual towers (Laruelle's), and both of whom are engaged in the process of ascent - Yvonne's literal, up the 'mildewed ladder' (334), the Consul's metaphorical - at the time at which they are struck down. Ostensibly however, on an occult plane, the lightning-struck tower is a card which again relates primarily to the Consul's predicament in that he alone is endowed with the potential awareness of the card's positive and negative divinatory aspects. Douglas characterises the upright meaning in terms of the 'suffering of an individual through the forces of destiny worked out in the world', and its reversed meaning as the 'calling down of a disaster which might have been avoided'.<sup>62</sup> Against such a dichotomy the Farolito, as ultimate goal of the Consul's quest, assumes the transmogrifying role of a location

where the forces of destiny are indeed finally worked out; on the other hand the Consul's single-minded route towards Parian brings with it the disaster which might have been avoided, indeed would have been avoided, had he refused to go there. (As stated earlier many of the dual meanings connected to the cards with which Lowry plays become applicable in both their possible manifestations depending on which way we regard the Consul's quest for transcendence; as, in fact, positive or negative.) Towers of different types dominate the terrain of Lowry's novel yet, on the Day of the Dead 1938, only one, the Farolito, is in proximity of the necessary 'Lightning flash[es]'(373) which are capable of bringing about its destruction (albeit metaphorically) as a refuge. The climax of Under the Volcano is indeed provided with a neat juxtaposition of Farolito (little lighthouse, 'tower') and approaching storm (lightning) which together tabularise the image on the Tarot card. In that the tower may also 'be likened to man's physical body, in which he is kept imprisoned by the bricks and mortar of his fleshly tenement',<sup>63</sup> the Consul himself, whose own erect manly carriage has been commented upon in the course of the novel more than once, also assumes the guise of the tower and becomes appropriately 'ignited' when 'fired'(373) upon by the police chiefs. In such a context Firmin's death again becomes transcendent, in that his mortal imprisonment is dispelled and death releases him from the captivity of an earthly existence.

Kathleen Raine writes that 'The Tower of the Tarot Trumps, the Maison Dieu, is above all, the Tower of Babel struck by the lightning of divine wrath, and signifies catastrophe and downfall. This emblem shows a full tower, whose burning roof, which is also a



crown, is struck off by a zig-zag of lightning, the 'lightning flash' of the Cabbalistic Tree'.<sup>64</sup> Throughout Under the Volcano Lowry also makes use of a Babel theme (see Towers) to demonstrate downfall and collapse; in Chapter Twelve the Consul perceives a voice becoming clear 'rising above the clamour - the Babel, he thought, the confusion of tongues'(367); and ironically, the Consul's death is perhaps partially brought about by the linguistic confusion generated both by his own drunkenness as well as through the fact that the police chief's knowledge of English is somewhat less than satisfactory. In Chapter One Lowry suggests that another type of communication breakdown - the cinema's electricity failure - is a possible result of the storm; that its wires have, at least metaphorically, been struck by lightning. Again Lowry aligns the actual elements of his narrative closely to the metaphysical; the Tarot card image thus both awakens and reinforces a host of supporting connections and ramifications. The Consul had alluded to the Cabbalistic Tree in his letter to Yvonne written in the Farolito, yet the letter is never sent (communication breakdown again); had it been sent then the catastrophe (the lightning struck tower, Babel's collapse, divine wrath, etc.) may have been averted. Simultaneous to the Consul's death is that of Yvonne; as she dies her vision of a northern paradise is rendered as becoming destroyed by fire for, in a sense, the haven or ivory tower she had mentally constructed for Geoffrey, where he could complete his book, is also struck down, its 'roof ... on fire'(336) as is the roof of the tower on the Tarot card!

Card XVII, the Star, is essentially symbolic of the star of Hope and brings with it the promise of a new and brighter dawn.

In Under the Volcano the card becomes closely applicable to Yvonne; a film 'star' of sorts herself, she constantly dreams of a revitalising and bright future of a 'Northern paradise' where she and the Consul will be able to live an idyllic and peaceful existence. The card depicts a young woman kneeling by a stream and 'Near the woman is sometimes pictured ... a butterfly [which for the Greeks] symbolised the soul'.<sup>65</sup> The butterfly is another of Lowry's symbols closely associated with Yvonne (see Animals): as she dies she equates the constellations she sees with 'myriads of beautiful butterflies'(335). Lind writes that 'Above the kneeling figure are seven stars; an eighth, larger than the others, is just over her head, at the top of the card. Astrologically, these smaller stars are the Pleiades; according to mythology, the seven daughters of Atlas'.<sup>66</sup> One of the constellations seen by Yvonne in Chapter Eleven is, of course, also the 'beneficent Pleiades'(323), and indeed 'Pleiades'(337) forms the chapter's final word. Yvonne's hope of a new existence with Geoffrey becomes destroyed with her death; nevertheless, as she feels herself 'suddenly gathered upwards and borne towards the stars'(337) Yvonne's 'soul' enacts the hope expressed by the Tarot card - a new life it would seem is granted her after all, yet its location is not of this world.<sup>67</sup>

Yvonne and Hugh also see the moon as they stare into the night sky; although the moon is also evoked elsewhere in the Volcano (see Wheels) the Tarot's eighteenth or Moon card would not appear to be greatly employed in Lowry's treatment. With the exception of the 'white horse' symbol depicted on the nineteenth or Sun card discussed above, it too is largely ignored by Lowry. Instead he turns, albeit briefly, to the two final cards of the Arcana, the

Day of Judgement and the World, to 'round off' his Tarotistic manipulation, and also, in some senses, his book. The Consul is, of course, judged, in a way, by the three interrogatory police chiefs within the confines of the Farolito, and further judgement of him is passed by another triumvirate - Vigil, Bustamente and Laruelle - in Chapter One. The card depicts three figures rising from the earth whilst an angel blows a trumpet. In terms of the Volcano the three figures could easily represent the Consul, Yvonne and Hugh, the winged angel, Laruelle. If we regard the Chapters Two - Twelve as Laruelle's creation then the spirits of the other protagonists become, in a sense, summoned by him; the Day of the Dead itself, on which the dead are said to become 're-born', assists in reiterating such a reading. (Of course, Hugh's fate is left ambiguous: Laruelle musing on his own future, however, thinks that 'like Hugh too, he did not know if his ship would ever reach port'(15) which perhaps implies that Hugh's own thoughts that his ship would 'probably be blown to smithereens'(107) have proved correct.)

The Tarot's final card, its twenty-second, is the World. It shows the 'ecstatic state of the soul when it has become fully conscious of its divine origin';<sup>67</sup> in a sense, the Consul and Yvonne both achieve an 'ecstatic' state at the point of death; and, appropriately, on his novel's penultimate page Lowry draws apocalyptic global or earth-shattering conclusions from his preceding narrative: 'the world itself was bursting, bursting into black spouts of villages catapulted into space'(375). Man also 'hears the music of Orpheus'<sup>68</sup> and just prior to his death the Consul also hears music, both in his brain, as well as in actuality - Hugh's

guitar, and Hugh, of course, is mythically compared to Orpheus (see Myth). Lind writes that 'Another interpretation of the card is that it symbolizes the Macrocosm or Universe, of which man is the Microcosm; the "little world" or "epitome".'<sup>69</sup> Such a dialectic has also been employed by Lowry in a number of ways throughout Under the Volcano: in the final two chapters especially he contrasts the universe with the individual in terms of their close kindred relationship. The World card therefore adequately brings to an end Lowry's manipulation of the arcana for, in the novel as in the sequence, it summarises and concludes many previous concerns.

Each of the Tarot trumps is also provided with a corresponding astrological attribute and some of these may also be of relevance to the complex ordering systems the cards generate. The astrological correlation for the Empress is Venus, and, as observed above, Yvonne assumes both archetypes of Tarot empress and Venusian love-goddess. The Pope card is represented by Taurus (the bull): the newspaper headlines which forms the last line of Chapter Seven - 'Es inevitable la muerte del Papa'(233) refers, by extension, also to the imminent death of the Consul; likewise, in Chapter Nine, the tortured bull in the Arena Tomalin again acts as a symbol for the imminent condition of Firmin when he becomes trapped and tortured in the confines of the Farolito. The Death card takes on the attribute of Scorpio: not only does the 2nd November fall into period of Scorpio, the Consul's drinking becomes compared with a scorpion stinging itself to death. The Lovers are represented by Gemini, the twins. Hugh and Yvonne are both the same age (twenty-nine), they share many identical experiences from the past, and they even dress similarly (see Mirrorings); moreover,

Lowry initially wished Chapter Eleven to culminate, not in Yvonne's death but in a love scene between the two (indeed, even in the final version the Consul still hears 'what sounded like the cries of love'(374) emanating from the forest). Finally, the Devil or Black Magician is represented by Capricorn, the goat: significantly the goat encountered in Chapter Four regards Hugh and Yvonne with 'a Machiavellian eye'(110) and again acts as another animal symbol for the Consul himself who, of course, may be a black magician.

Raine also observes a distinct correlation between the Tarot's twenty-two paths and 'twenty-two constellations with their fine Yeatslike names - the Virgin, Hercules, Eagle, Sagittarius, Ox-driver, Lion, Balance, Dragon of the Pole and the rest - names which are themselves a record and witness of that abiding human instinct to project upon the universe of the macrocosm the archetypal configurations of the soul'.<sup>70</sup> Many of these constellations appear in Chapter Eleven of Under the Volcano: 'Virgo'(323), 'Hercules'(331), 'Sagittarius'(322), 'Leo'(323), 'the Scales'(323), etc. They again serve to reinforce Lowry's desire to render the more esoteric aspects of his world-view (with its Tarotistic, astrological and occult significances) as a direct manifestation of the physical world or universe portrayed in the novel.

My discussion of the Tarot's role in Under the Volcano has centred itself, more or less exclusively, on the major arcana of the twenty-two individual picture cards, yet there are another fifty-six cards in a Tarot pack which fall into four suits

comprising fourteen numbered cards each: the lance (or razor), the sword, the cup, and the dish (or pentacle); and New points out that the titular groupings of the 'four suits of the minor arcana ... are recurrent images in Under the Volcano'.<sup>71</sup> Indeed this would seem to be the case - the omnipresent drinking theme, for example, obviously emphasises 'cups', whilst Hugh uses a cut-throat razor to shave his half-brother, etc.

Lowry employs the Tarot in Under the Volcano to interesting effect: with its assistance many areas of the text fall into a much sharper focus, yet that focus can only be achieved if one has taken the trouble to eke out the various meanings and relevances of the cards. Many aspects of Lowry's novel become clearer when outside assistance is brought to bear on them yet these aspects still tend to make some logical sense purely within the context of the book itself. This is not the case with the Tarot; and, as such, the arcana offers probably the least accessible and most disguised ordering system to be used by the author. It may be argued that such an esoteric and aloof stance as the one Lowry takes to the Tarot places too great a burden on the reader of his fiction. I would like to think, however, that the Tarot's presence both in (and beyond) the novel forms a challenging and open invitation for further imaginative play across the endless 'links' of Lowry's golf-course.

THE TAROT - NOTES

1. - See Appendix One.
2. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters (London, 1967), p.78.
3. - Frank Lind, How to Understand the Tarot (The Aquarian Press, Wellingborough, 1979), p.10.
4. - Kathleen Raine, Yeats, The Tarot and the Golden Dawn (Dublin, 1972), p.15.
5. - See Appendix One.
6. - Raine, Yeats, The Tarot and the Golden Dawn, p.15.
7. - Ellen McDaniel, 'The Magus: Fowles's Tarot Quest,' Journal of Modern Literature, Vol.8, No.2 (Temple University, Philadelphia, 1981), p.248.
8. - *ibid.*, pp.249-50.
9. - Lowry, Selected Letters, p.78.
10. - Alfred Douglas, The Tarot: The Origins, Meaning and Uses of the Cards (Harmondsworth, 1972), p.36.
11. - *ibid.*, p.77.
12. - *ibid.*, p.78.
13. - Raine, Yeats, The Tarot and the Golden Dawn, pp.18-19.
14. - Lind, How to Understand the Tarot, p.70.
15. - Douglas, The Tarot, p.43.
16. - William H. New, Malcolm Lowry (Toronto, 1971), p.40.
17. - Lind, How to Understand the Tarot, pp.14-15.
18. - Douglas, The Tarot, p.47.
19. - *ibid.*, p.56.
20. - For a detailed description of the outlines of the novel's second draft see Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography (London, 1974), pp.258-70. Day describes Chapter Two opening with 'Yvonne Ames, the 24-year-old daughter of the Consul ... in her hotel room in Acapulco' (p.261).
21. - Douglas, The Tarot, p.57. William Gray suggests that the Emperor is 'certainly not of this world' - see The Talking Tree (York Beach, Maine, 1977), p.128 - and in the opening pages of the Volcano Lowry is also eager to stress aspects of the Consul's 'vacant' otherworldliness.

22. - Douglas, The Tarot, p.58.
23. - Lind, How to Understand the Tarot, p.17.
24. - ibid., p.25.
25. - Gray, The Talking Tree, p.308.
26. - Douglas, The Tarot, p.64.
27. - Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, p.340.
28. - See my own unpublished M.A. dissertation - 'Bridging the Abyss: Polarities and Parallels in Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano' (The University of East Anglia, 1978).
29. - Douglas, The Tarot, p.71.
30. - ibid., p.71.
31. - Gray, The Talking Tree, p.77.
32. - ibid., p.77.
33. - Douglas, The Tarot, p.73.
34. - ibid., p.73.
35. - Lind, How to Understand the Tarot, p.34.
36. - Gray, The Talking Tree, p.214.
37. - Douglas, The Tarot, p.76.
38. - McDaniel, 'The Magus: Fowles's Tarot Quest', Journal of Modern Literature, p.255.
39. - Lind, How to Understand the Tarot, p.35.
40. - Raine, Yeats, The Tarot and the Golden Dawn, pp.21-22.  
  
(It may be worth noting that Kathleen Raine was a contemporary and even, possibly, an acquaintance of Lowry at Cambridge - see Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, p.114. Lowry and Raine both attended, in Day's words, 'a sort of informal salon or open house for Cambridge's young aesthetes'.)
41. - Lowry, Selected Letters, p.70.
42. - Lind, How to Understand the Tarot, p.40.
43. - Although it is the Ferris Wheel which ostensibly represents the Wheel of Fortune in the context of the novel the Infernal Machine also takes on some of the important ramifications of the wheel symbol, for example, Lowry plays with the concept of eternal return when nearly all the



possessions Firmin loses during his plunging circuits are returned to him by local children - a notable exception is his passport, which he may not have had with him anyway but the absence of which in the Farolito later assists in sealing his fate.

- 44. - Douglas, The Tarot, p.81.
- 45. - Lind, How to Understand the Tarot, pp.41-42.
- 46. - Kristofer Dorosz also notices the relevance of the Hanged Man card to the Infernal Machine scene yet he totally attributes Douglas' negative reading of the card to the Consul's predicament terming the Consul's search for transcendence a mystical failure:

'Without going into a detailed interpretation of the card, it will be sufficient to point out that the Hanged Man represents a man who lives in a dream of mystical idealism.... In his negative aspect he is "the vague idealist who lives in his own imaginary dream world, located neither in Heaven nor on earth, but suspended somewhere between the two in a place of his own invention. His eyes are turned inward and he is blind to the beauty that lies all around him, as he hangs by the thread of his wild fantasy". Douglas, The Tarot, p.82.'

See Kristofer Dorosz, Malcolm Lowry's Infernal Paradise (Uppsala, 1976), p.148.

Dorosz's citing of the Hanged Man's/Consul's world as 'neither in Heaven, nor on earth' is at variance with the rest of his study in which he views Firmin as living in Hell; moreover, he refuses to read Douglas's positive meaning of the card as applicable to Geoffrey's inner transformation: 'Flexibility of mind. Willingness to submit oneself to the dictates of the inner self and cast aside practical considerations when the time is right. Wisdom and guidance from the unconscious'. Douglas, The Tarot, p.82.

- 47. - Lind, How to Understand the Tarot, p.42.
- 48. - Lind, How to Understand the Tarot, p.40.
- 49. - David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano: Myth, Symbol, Meaning (New York, 1978), p.189.
- 50. - Douglas, The Tarot, p.84.
- 51. - Gray, The Talking Tree, p.165.
- 52. - *ibid.*, p.145.
- 53. - *ibid.*, p.146.
- 54. - *ibid.*, pp.146-7.
- 55. - Lowry, Selected Letters, p.199.

56. - Gray, The Talking Tree, p.169.
57. - In the letter to Derek Pethick cited above Lowry leaves the Consul's black magician status again ambiguous: 'Has the Consul perhaps been a black magician at one time? We don't know' (Lowry, Selected Letters, p.199).
58. - Lind, How to Understand the Tarot, p.48.
59. - B.W. Martin, The Dictionary of the Occult (London, 1979), p.66.
60. - The defecation, intercourse and blood sacrifice of the black mass all take place on the 'high' altar itself: Lowry's high altar is represented by the room in the Farolito where the Consul's intercourse with the whore takes place, the floor of which is 'befouled'(352) and the bed covered with 'bloodstains', (349).
61. - Douglas, The Tarot, p.93.
62. - *ibid.*, p.95.
63. - Lind, How to Understand the Tarot, p.51.
64. - Raine, Yeats. The Tarot and the Golden Dawn, p.51.
65. - Lind, How to Understand the Tarot, p.54.
66. - *ibid.*, p.54.  
  
Lind writes of the Pleiades that they all 'with the exception of Merope, who married Sisyphus, king of Corinth, had immortal gods for their suitors' (*ibid.*, p.54): the Sisyphean predicament of the protagonists of Under the Volcano, caught, as they are, in a cyclical, repetitive world (see Wheels) in a sense denies, in the context of the novel, the hope which the card portrays; as such the beneficent Pleiades, as Lowry describes them, also intrinsically have their beneficence ironically undercut.
67. - Lind, How to Understand the Tarot, p.66.
68. - *ibid.*, p.65.
69. - *ibid.*, p.66.
70. - Raine, Yeats. The Tarot and the Golden Dawn, p.48.
71. - New, Malcolm Lowry, p.39.

PART TWO : SYMBOLIC SYSTEMS OF ORDER

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territory. In his Biography Douglas Day briefly describes the surroundings pertaining to the Cuernavacaan location which Lowry encountered for the first time in 1936 and which he made the direct model for his own Quahnahuac:<sup>1</sup>

The surroundings were spectacular ... and the terrain was ideally suited to the eternally symbolizing Lowry: here was the ruined palace on the surface of the earth; the magic mountains in the distance, rising like the Mount of Purgatory to heaven; and at one's feet, apparently bottomless and certainly feculent, was the abyss. <sup>2</sup>

Indeed, in Lowry's own words, for a novel

concerned principally ... with the forces in man which cause him to be terrified of himself ... also concerned with the guilt of man, with his remorse, with his ceaseless struggling toward the light under the weight of the past, and with his doom, <sup>3</sup>

the real and subsequently symbolically imagined territory of central Mexico with its peaks and ravines, its eternal 'ups and downs', so to speak, indeed proved ideal. Much of the action of Under the Volcano (roughly a half I would estimate) takes place outdoors and, as such, the protagonists' fields of vision are consistently caught both by the volcanoes dominating the skyline as well as by the ravines, more specifically the single ravine Lowry dwells upon, the barranca, which lie at their feet, and which are both vital elements of and natural antitheses inherent to the landscape. Furthermore, ~~in~~ <sup>in</sup> the characters, especially the central trio of the Consul, Hugh and Yvonne, are often to be found on the move - arriving in Quahnahuac, riding around the surrounding countryside on horseback,

walking about the ancient and hilly town, undergoing a bus journey to a bull-fight, running and stumbling through jungles, etc. - they are also consistently required to negotiate the generally undulating terrain underfoot of which the summit of the volcano and the bottom of the ravine represent the two extremes.

Ascent and descent and their metaphorical ramifications of salvation and damnation provide Under the Volcano with one of its major dialectics. The protagonists are forever climbing or rising, falling and sinking, ultimately becoming caught in an eternal vortex between the conflicting polarities of zenith and nadir. Within this symbolic field of play, so to speak, of volcano and barranca, ascent and descent, Lowry is openly also able to reinforce his novel's basic Dante-esque structure. Essentially the barranca or gaping ravine which snakes its way through the town and also follows the characters out into the Mexican countryside becomes the cloacal abyss - a direct evocation of Hell and eternal damnation. The novel's slopes or inclines, essentially present, of course, in the volcanoes themselves, but becoming reinforced throughout the text by various other gradients and climbs, for example, the hill on which the Consul's house stands, the spiral staircases of Laruelle's towers, the Aztec pyramid of Tenochtitlan, the round hill at Cholula, etc., must be seen as being evocative of a purgatorial ascent out of the netherworld.<sup>4</sup> A Paradiso of sorts is present basically in the form of the summits of the volcanoes and that which lies above and beyond them - the white snow of the peaks, the clear blue sky into which the mountains ethereally rise (see also Colours), the stars and constellations of the night sky, etc. Although ostensibly, in Lowry's initial

scheme, the Inferno equivalent of a Modern Divine Comedy, Under the Volcano fundamentally toys with, and subsequently charts, all three different areas or zones of Dante's cosmological spectrum. Indeed, just as Dante places strategic pre-echoes of Purgatorio and Paradiso into his Inferno so Lowry does the same, although perhaps on something of an even more complex scale. Often Lowry imbues his text with a vast framework of reference, as is the case with the Divine Comedy correlations, but he infrequently transposes a series of given situations anything like directly from the borrowed work (Joyce's employment of the Odyssey for his Ulysses perhaps affords a comparison here); instead, he constantly elaborates and ornaments a basic idea (like the Dante parallels, or the Faust/Faustus archetype, or the edenic theme) through continuous, although varied and often tentative allusion and 'potential' reference, rather than in terms of extended and detailed explanation. Lowry's message could be: Dante is in there somewhere (as is Faust, as is Adam, etc.), so make of him what you will. (Again any individual reader's knowledge of Dante implicitly enlarges the scope of Lowry's Dante-esque borrowings for an intricate 'personal' series of correspondences can soon be generated from Lowry's general Dante-esque clues; his landscape symbolism, for example.)

In his Introduction to Under the Volcano Stephen Spender attempts to tackle the Dante-esque sub-structure of the novel and ultimately writes of the Consul:

being chosen by one's addictions means also that there is a postponed choice, not in one's own hands, but in one's heart, though unknown to oneself, the choice which decides whether one is damaged in Hell or whether - without knowing it

oneself - one is seeking redemption: whether one is in Purgatory ... The Consul is not in Hell but in Purgatory, surely. <sup>5</sup>

It is also however, with some basic manipulation of the actual allusionary framework of Lowry's novel, rather easy to make out a case for Firmin being in Paradise (in a Dante-esque sense that is): the Consul (Dante) has left Dr. Vigil (Virgil), who has accompanied him through most of the previous day and night (Inferno and Purgatorio?), behind him and in Yvonne now meets his Beatrice with whom he ascends to the ethereal light; she must remain there, 'gathered upwards and borne towards the stars'(337), whilst he, by nature of an abrupt descent, 'falling, into a forest, falling'(376), finds himself once more back in the dark wood. The potential Dante-esque permutations which riddle Lowry's text are manifold; he introduces Dante-esque material in abundance but allows it to be clearly specified only by the reader. Suffice to say I think that Lowry's manipulation and reworking of Dante is deliberately confusing and purposefully ambiguous. Nonetheless volcano and ravine, not to mention all that lies in between, undoubtedly are made to suggest a basic polarity, one assisted by Dante's scheme although not one constructively enlarged upon through reference to him; a polarity representing, for the main protagonists at least, a heaven and hell. However, these features of the terrain also function on a fundamental and actual level in the novel irrespective of their symbolic or allusionary roles, as George Woodcock makes clear:

Mountain and barranca may symbolize the heaven and hell within the Consul's heart, but they play their essential role in the novel - that of correlatives - only by being their solid selves: as solid, indeed, as symbols, if they are to be effective, must always become. <sup>6</sup>



As is the case with the majority of Lowry's symbols, the volcano and ravine become hyper-effective because of their involvement in the course of the action itself: the ravine forms a boundary to the Consul's garden, he is thrown down it at the end; the volcanoes dominate the skyline, as the novel progresses the characters get nearer and nearer to the mountains, they put forward the idea of climbing them, etc.

The title of Lowry's novel - Under the Volcano - attests to the ubiquitous presence on the 'scene', and throughout the narrative, of the natural phenomenon of a volcano yet, virtually as soon as we begin to read, it becomes evident that there are really a pair of volcanoes in question: the novel's first sentence charts the presence of 'Two mountain chains', whilst in its second sentence the peaks themselves become isolated by nature of a reference to the town being 'dominated by two volcanoes'(9). (The twin volcanoes assist in contributing to the aura of duality Lowry meticulously establishes at the onset of his novel and maintains throughout it, for, in the main, the text will also become dominated by 'two'; and they are thus mirrored and assisted in their dualistic role; on a geological level, by the two-sided abyss; on a man-made level, by the twin towers of Jacques' house; and, on a human/character level, by ~~virtue~~ of the fact that the narrative itself also splits into two at various points, one section recording the Consul's actions, the other half those of Hugh and Yvonne.) Frequently, as the narrative progresses, the two volcanoes are made to become virtually synonymous and thus naturally comparable by being described collectively: 'the two volcanoes, Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, rose clear and magnificent into the sunset'(11), but

often, however, they are also made to serve to underline 'the eternal horror of opposites'(134) which constantly informs Lowry's novel and which he often employs in order to accentuate a rift 'between' (in this instant one developed through references to the inherent rift between the volcanoes) with which he then proceeds to reinforce, symbolically, a variety of similar human 'rift' situations. For example:

Beyond the barranca the plains rolled up to the very foot of the volcanoes into a barrier of murk above which rose the pure cone of old Popo, and spreading to the left of it like a University City in the snow the jagged peaks of Ixtaccihuatl, and for a moment they [Yvonne and the Consul] stood on the porch without speaking, not holding hands, but with their hands just meeting, as though not quite sure they weren't dreaming this, each of them separately on their far bereaved cots, their hands but blown fragments of their memories, half afraid to commingle, yet touching over the howling sea at night. (72)

In the above single-sentenced paragraph the dominant contrast between the 'pure cone' of one volcano and the 'jagged peaks' of the other both introduces and then strengthens Lowry's employment of dichotomy and polarity throughout the passage: the barranca, the novel's prime symbol of rift (see below) is invoked; moreover, the Consul and Yvonne are described as 'each of them separately' to demonstrate that they are single units and cannot be rejoined as one.

No less than approximately fifty references attest to the presence of the volcanoes on the scene of the action. Because of the repetitive naming of and charting of the peaks within Lowry's fictional world they gradually assume virtually tangible form;

certainly they impinge themselves in different ways on all four major protagonists: walking around Quahnahuac in the early evening Laruelle thinks that the 'volcanoes seemed terrifying in the wild sunset'(15); on her flight to the town from Acapulco Yvonne notices 'the volcanoes abruptly wheeling into view from the glowing east'(50); when Hugh is circling down in the little old bus to Tomalin he perceives Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl constantly dipping in and out of vision, 'never appearing the same twice, now far away, then vastly near at hand, incalculably distant at one moment, at the next looming round the corner'(255); at Parian, glancing through the window, the Consul becomes aware of one of the volcanoes looming over him, 'its immense flanks partly hidden by rolling thunderheads; its peak blocking the sky, it appeared almost right overhead'(340). Much of Lowry's interest in the volcanoes would essentially seem to reside in being able to depict an aspect of the mutual relationship which exists between man and his environment. In that the characters consistently infuse the peaks with a 'soul', or other human trait, one could suggest that of all the symbols employed in the novel they are the ones (or the one) which derive much of their 'symbolism' from the reactions of the central figures themselves. Each of the four central actors in Under the Volcano, especially Yvonne and the Consul, respond avidly to the presence of the two mountains; the volcanoes form the dominant landmarks in the terrain in which they operate; moreover, as suggested earlier, their duality seems to carry with it an inherent ambivalence which can be easily transferred to correspond to the ambiguity and uncertainty which affects all their lives.

The Consul's attitude towards the peaks, in terms of his relationship with his ex-wife especially, remains rather cynical. On the other hand Yvonne, however, as she returns to Quahnahuac in the early morning in the hope of living a 'new day' with Geoffrey, immediately thinks of her potentially ideal predicament whilst 'gazing over the valley beyond which as if nothing had happened and it was November 1936 and not November 1938, rose, eternally, her volcanoes, her beautiful, beautiful volcanoes'(49). In Yvonne's eyes the eternal aspect of the twin volcanoes becomes assisted and re-established by feelings of nostalgia and reminiscence for 'distant' sentimental days. (This distant sentimental attribute of the twin peaks is also perhaps brought about, in Yvonne's case, by ~~virtue~~ of the fact that she spent her golden childhood on the volcanic island of Hawaii; at one point Lowry defines the Mexican volcanoes as 'remote ambassadors of Mauna Loa, Mokuaweoweo'(63). As the day wears on, however, the beautiful and idyllic qualities of the mountains are soon to become subsumed.

Lowry follows the name 'Mokuaweoweo' with a colon and then the clause: 'dark clouds now obscured their base'(63). As the action of Under the Volcano progresses the real, and also, of course, metaphorical, dark clouds gradually rise (until they finally 'erupt' in the cataclysmic thunderstorm) and the idyllic aspect of the volcanoes also gradually, yet inexorably, becomes obscured. At the Arena Tomalin Yvonne looks into her compact mirror and sees the volcano 'Popocatepetl [which] seemed even more beautiful for being reflected, its summit brilliant against pitch-massed cloud banks' [my italics] (258). A little later, however, Lowry provides her

with 'the awful sensation that, not Popocatepetl, but the old woman with the dominoes that morning, was looking over her shoulder' (258). The idyllic volcanoes have thus, in a way, become transformed to the evil omen of the fateful woman with the dominoes (there is nothing in the text to suggest that this woman is in any way evil though when Yvonne first sees her in the Bella Vista in the morning she thinks: 'The old woman with her chicken and the dominoes chilled her heart. It was like an evil omen'(56)); and certainly as the volcanoes have gradually got nearer, or rather as the protagonists have gradually neared the volcanoes, although Lowry frequently animates his peaks allowing them to 'move' - 'Popocatepetl came in view, an apparition already circling away, that beckoned them forward'(239) - they have also become, or at least appeared to become, more human and thus, in the context of the sinister human world of Mexico, also more threatening. As Sherril Grace writes: 'the landscape mirrors the turmoil of the soul at the same time as it appears to embody evil and hostile forces',<sup>7</sup> and this would undoubtedly seem true; yet one could even amplify the statement to say that, as the day progresses, the individual turmoils in the souls of the characters become greater and that these tensions become reflected in the landscape around them which increasingly appears to embody evil and hostile forces.

The volcano Popocatepetl itself is constantly characterised by its ambiguous nature in that it appears to present conflicting facets at the same time: 'Popocatepetl loomed, pyramidal, to their right, one side beautifully curved as a woman's breast, the other precipitous, jagged, ferocious'(243).<sup>8</sup> Indeed, on the bus journey to Tomalin as the volcano forever dips in and out of view,

it never exhibits the same picture to the protagonists. Instead, with the bends in the road, its topographical shape changes constantly. Lowry may well mean to employ these constant transformations as a metaphor for his characters' own vacillating responses to the peaks for the meaning of the volcanoes in the eyes of the main characters also changes according to the peculiar emotional predicament in which they find themselves. **Against** such an existential context the volcano/volcanoes offer probably the least stable symbol in the novel in that what they represent is forever altering: ranging from exhilaration at their beauty to apprehension of their ominous power; from becoming a touchstone of man's aspirations to appearing a downright negation of those aspirations; from an emblem of the perfect marriage to the recognition of the impossibility of such a marriage, etc.

The complex relationship of the Consul and Yvonne is an aspect of Lowry's novel which is virtually as enigmatic as the peaks themselves, and which Lowry thus finds eminently suitable for employing his volcanic duo. The Aztec tale concerning the personification of the volcanoes provides Lowry with a mythic core, as it were, upon which to build his layers of symbolism:

But in the tragic Indian legend Popocatepetl himself was strangely the dreamer: the fires of his warrior's love, never extinct in the poet's heart, burned eternally for Ixtaccihuatl, whom he had no sooner found than lost, and whom he guarded in her endless sleep ... (318, 19)

At the end of Chapter Three of Under the Volcano the Consul halfheartedly attempts to persuade himself to give up drinking and then,

lying back in his chair, notices the volcanoes before him: 'Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl, that image of the perfect marriage, lay now clear and beautiful on the horizon under an almost pure morning sky'(97). In terms of the twin volcanoes representing Geoffrey and Yvonne the image of the perfect marriage is projected into a largely ironical context in that the Consul has no intention of giving up drinking (and indeed is still recovering from a gigantic hangover at the time he decides he needs to lie down) and is thus constantly jeopardising his less than perfect marriage; indeed, he is already divorced from Yvonne. Against this already rather dubious volcanic background the later rendered Aztec myth becomes relativised to conform to the earlier irony: Popocatepetl (the Smoking Warrior/the Consul)<sup>9</sup> has no sooner found his beloved Ixtaccihuatl (Yvonne) than lost her again. The twin volcanoes may represent the possibility of a perfect marriage but already 'mythically' that possibility becomes denied; similarly, the Consul's and Yvonne's own possible perfect marriage becomes in actuality denied by their incompatibility, not just I believe, as some critics seem to suggest, by the Consul's drunkenness.

Occasionally the Consul becomes, perhaps one could say, 'guilty' about his life-style; he feels depressed or remorseful, and such are, at least partly, the nature of his thoughts when he is confronted in his garden by the strict words of Dr Vigil (which, in a way, reinforce the message on the garden sign). At this point the Consul is rendered as:

lifting his face towards the volcanoes and feeling his desolation go out to those heights where even now at mid-morning the howling snow would whip the face, and the ground beneath the feet was dead lava, a soulless petrified residue of extinct plasm in which even the wildest and loneliest trees would never take root. (148)

Earlier I suggested that the slope of the volcanoes helped to demonstrate an aspect of the Purgatorio represented in the novel, and the Consul, conceiving of the horrendous conditions on the slopes, must here too be perhaps regarded as considering an act of purgation. (The fact that no trees take root on the summits of the mountains may suggest that Firmin can no longer hide from his responsibilities, or from life in general, as he can amongst the heavily wooded valleys of the lower landscape. Again the Dante-esque manipulations become entwined, for the trees represent a 'bosca obscura', or dark wood, one even metaphorically reinforced by some of the dark cantinas in which the Consul also literally hides, for example, the El Bosque - see both Trees and Cantinas.) Geoffrey's vision of the heights implies some act of transcendence; this notion becomes gradually reinforced throughout the day by the idea (which for Firmin becomes an 'idée fixe') of actually climbing the volcano.

Hugh firstly puts forward the possibility of actually climbing the volcano in Chapter Four. Reflecting on his boredom and inactivity he remembers his heroic foil, Juan Cerillo, and thinks that 'he'd entertained a quite serious notion with him of finding time to climb Popo'(128). Gradually, as the day progresses, the idea seems to be reduced to little more than a joke and this is how it becomes represented in Hugh and Yvonne's dialogue in the Salon Ofelia:



'- What do you think, Yvonne, if sometime we  
climb that baby, Popo I mean - '  
'Good heavens why! Haven't you had enough  
exercise for one - '  
' - might be a good idea to harden your muscles  
first, try a few small peaks.'  
They were joking. But the Consul was not joking.  
His second mescal had become serious. (289,90)

Not only has the Consul's second mescal become serious but, for him at least, the idea of climbing the volcano has also become a serious end. Just as the volcanoes had reminded Yvonne of her Hawaiian origins so they also serve to rekindle in the Consul memories of his youth in the Himalayas under the peaks of Hindu Kush and Karakoram; moreover, just as Geoffrey's father had disappeared into the Himalayas never to return so he too is to disappear under the pretext of an 'ascent' (see below).<sup>10</sup> For Firmin the concept of climbing Popocatepetl must parallel, in a way, the search for light and truth he experienced in his vision of the 'mighty mountain Himavat' (129) which must be spiritually conquered 'by degrees' and with 'souls well disciplined' (129). (Markson points out the obvious cabbalistic overtones integrated into the ascent motif throughout Under the Volcano in general, and especially in the Consul's 'dream', with which Chapter Five commences:

Lowry makes use of the Cabbalistic Tree of Life; the summit in this case being 'Kether', or light, and the dream itself ends with the word light repeated no less than eight times in a sentence - an ultimate 'illuminist' outcry.) <sup>11</sup>

With his numerous references to mythical, literary and actual mountains, he also alludes to the Hellenic mount Erebus and the summit of salvation in Dante's Divine Comedy, Lowry ingeniously

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continuously enlarges the maze of meanings connected to his volcanic climbing motif. The pinnacle of this theme, as it were, is not fully explored until the final pages of the novel yet frequently a variation or slant thereof is brought into play (and the end thus yet again foreshadowed) within the course of the narrative. In Chapter Three, surreptitiously leaving his house to go in search of a drink, the Consul finds himself 'guiltily climbing the Calle Nicaragua. It was as if he were toiling up some endless staircase between houses. Or perhaps even old Popeye itself'(81); slightly later the effort of climbing becomes too much of a chore for Geoffrey and he suddenly finds himself lying 'face downward on the deserted street'(82) - at the end of the book too the Consul will find himself engaging in an imaginary act of ascent as he lies face down on the ground riddled with bullets.

The end of Under the Volcano evinces Firmin linking the mythical peaks of the novel plus the mountains in northern India with the volcano; as he lies on the ground he thinks:

He was in Kashmir, he knew, lying in the meadows near running water among violets and trefoil, the Himalayas beyond, which made it all the more remarkable he should suddenly be setting out with Hugh and Yvonne to climb Popocatepetl. (374)

At the point of death Firmin achieves a final moment of intuition and awareness; illusion and reality fuse to grant the Consul a synoptic view of the all-embracing meaning of life, and of, in Lowry's metaphorical schema, 'ascent'. In a sense he achieves a moment of triumph when he envisages himself trudging 'the slope of the foothills toward Amecameca alone'(375) having set out with

the 'Hotel Fausto's information'(375) in his hand. (At this stage of the novel the Faustus archetype is surely rejected, the Fausto reference referring implicitly to Goethe's Faust and thus also to the last of the book's three epigraphs: 'Whosoever unceasingly strives upward ... him can we save'(7).) The Consul then imagines himself as having collapsed and then of being rescued and transported 'in an ambulance shrieking through the jungle itself, racing uphill past the timberline toward the peak'(375).<sup>12</sup> Unconventionally, as he concedes, and albeit in a dream, the Consul attains the volcano's summit. He begs Yvonne to forgive him and then feels that 'Strong hands lifted him'(375); whether these strong hands are those of angels hoisting him heavenwards or whether they are simply the actual strong hands of the Fascists about to cast his carcass into the abyss forms another and perhaps, the final, ambiguity of Lowry's novel. The reader (player) of Under the Volcano is allowed to discriminately choose which route he pleases although perhaps the best option to take is to keep both possibilities in mind and play one's ball firmly between the two conflicting obstacles. The volcano reflects the abyss and vice versa; only by an examination of both (and of their symbiotic relationship) can the system of order which they represent in the novel become assimilated.

I tend to disagree with Douglas Day when he writes:

In Lowry's novel the conventional salvific notions about ascent of the magic mountain are employed only ironically, negatively; what really concerns him is what, after all, is under the volcano: the frightening realm of Tartarus, the infernal abyss below Hades. <sup>13</sup>

Day, in his overwhelming desire to place a definitive, all-obliterating 'meaning' onto the text of Under the Volcano, falls into a barranca of sorts himself when he pretends to know what are really Lowry's true concerns and motives. Lowry's text is characterised in all aspects by its ambiguity; the complex range of patterns and forms it is capable of generating is made possible, to some extent, by ~~virtue~~ of the fact that it does not labour any single didactic statement which would inevitably cancel out some of its infinite possibilities. Both volcano and ravine are employed in natural contrast to each other, thus mirroring the contradictory thrusts of the Infernal Machine, but they are also mutually dependent and produce their far-reaching resonances only by operating, as a system of order that is, in harmony; and, as such, they are also metaphorically represented by the smoothly revolving wheel.

Again, as in the case with the volcano, the peculiar geographical feature of the Mexican terrain plays a vital and intrinsic role in the novel. Wherever the protagonists turn the abyss gapes invitingly, inspiring horror and presaging death. Lowry frequently corroborates the full implications of the barranca by making it an emblem for many types of hell, for example, as a place of perpetual suffering, a Tartarus, or as an omen or portent of death; death and subsequently in-built 'descent'. The 'hellish' times of the approaching Second World War are again also transposed onto the ravine; indeed, throughout the novel much becomes, so to speak, 'thrown' into it. Laruelle, on his final solitary walk around Quahnahuac, crossing the ravine on a bridge, looks down and simultaneously introduces many of the ramifications and associations the barranca is to have during the course of the

action: 'here was finality indeed, and cleavage! Quahnahuac was like the times in this respect, wherever you turned the abyss was waiting for you round the corner. Dormitory for vultures and city Moloch!'(21).

The universal hell outwardly represented by the barranca is, however, in the Consul's terms at least metamorphosed into a personal hell; and as such (perhaps because of his possible black magic interests) it is made to become both repellent as well as inviting. At the Farolito Firmin sees the barranca in the following terms: 'It was almost a sheer drop to the bottom of the ravine. What a dark, melancholy place'(339), yet earlier in the day he regards it from a much more jocular perspective: 'Ah the frightful cleft, the eternal horror of opposites! Thou mighty gulf, insatiate cormorant, deride me not, though I seem petulant to fall into thy chops'(134). The perception of the eternal horror of opposites (innumerable dialectics inform Lowry's novel) and the theory that hell may be both tragic and comic are views which only the Consul of the protagonists of the Volcano possesses. Furthermore, his viewpoint that, after all, every abyss has two sides to it in many ways deflates those critics, and Day is amongst them, who regard Firmin's fall, and implicitly the barranca also, in a purely negative light. (An oft quoted segment of the novel, within the context of a desire to damn the Consul, are the lines said by Geoffrey as he leaves the Salon Ofelia and heads for the Farolito - 'I love hell. I can't wait to get back there. In fact I'm running. I'm almost back there already'; yet most critics attempting to justify a 'thumbs down' for Firmin once and for all omit the following sentence from their quotation: 'He was running too, in

spite of his limp, calling back to them crazily, and the queer thing was he wasn't quite serious' [*my italics*] (316).) When driven **by** his latent death-wish the Consul recognises the truth that a hell of sorts in fact represents the obvious solution to his problem and, as such, the ravine becomes an inviting (exciting) way out.<sup>14</sup> At Parian the Consul makes another sort of joke about the ravine by deliberately childishly thinking it an 'awful way down to the bottom', and in the very next sentence Lowry makes the point that 'he was not afraid to fall either' (340).

In the finale of his novel to which after all, and probably more so than in any other novel, everything is geared and orientated, Lowry defines hell as both a state of mind and an actual series of tangible locations - Parian, the Farolito, the barranca. Here present suffering combines with past suffering (as well as with the harsh reality of external circumstances) to evoke a wish of self-destruction within the Consul. Ultimately the barranca proves both metaphorically, and literally, the culmination of Firmin's obscure quest which appears to have dominated most of his life and certainly his final day.

At the Farolito, with his last hour ticking away, the Consul's last ordeal in life, and his first ordeal in death, consists of his imminent confrontation with the 'spirit of the abyss' (22). Lowry ingeniously links this event with a past torment when he draws attention to the relationship between the barranca and the golf-course in an original (if rather forced) piece of word association: 'It had shown lack of imagination to build the local course back up there, remote from the barranca. Golf = gouffre = gulf' (206). With this equation Lowry once again breaks

down the limits of time and space conflating, at the same juncture, many years of the Consul's life and many pages of his novel, for the recollection is undoubtedly meant to awaken a connection between the barranca and the Hell Bunker on the Leasowe golf-course. The hazard is described in terms of an 'abyss [which] yawned in such a position as to engulf the third shot of a golfer like Geoffrey'(26), whilst at Parian the barranca is again described as an 'abyss [which] yawned, waiting'(362); moreover, the bunker waits to engulf the third shot of a player like Geoffrey whilst at the Farolito Firmin is shot three times before the barranca engulfs him.- 'The Chief of Rostrums pushed the Consul back out of the light, took two steps forward, and fired.... The Chief fired twice more, the shots spaced, deliberate'(373). Throughout the novel the barranca is also often referred to by Dante's term for the bottomless pit in the Inferno, the Malebolge; another ingenious implied connection between the bunker and the ravine can thus be made if we recall that the Malebolge is to be found in the eighth circle of Dante's Hell and the Hell Bunker straddles the eighth fairway of the Leasowe golf-course. Dante commences his description of the pit in Canto XVIII as follows:

There is in Hell a region that is called  
Malbowges; it is all of iron-grey shone,  
Like the huge barrier-rock with which its called.

Plumb in the middle of the dreadful cone  
There yawns a well, exceeding deep and wide,  
Whose form and fashion shall be told anon. 15

Lowry's barranca and his bunker and Dante's pit all yawn, whilst it may not be purely a coincidence that Dante's Malbowges is all of iron-grey stone whilst the Hell Bunker is to be located amongst



the 'grey dunes of Cheshire'(15,16) - see also Colours. One of the reasons for Firmin's close identification and relationship with the barranca may thus derive from the Hell Bunker experience of his youth. Certainly Lowry plays a few games with his golf = gulf equation as a fundamental ordering principle of his text.

It is not only the Consul who senses the horrifying presence of the deep abyss meandering through the Mexican countryside, although for him **it** probably has more personally relevant implications which are linked especially to his Cabbalistic interests - in his letter he asks Yvonne, or rather himself in that, firstly, she is unlikely to comprehend his occult terminology, and secondly, the letter is never sent:

Or do you find me between Mercy and Understanding, between Chesed and Binah (but still at Chesed) - my equilibrium, and equilibrium is all, precarious - balancing, teetering over the awful unbridgeable void, the all-but-unretraceable path of God's lightning back to God? As if I were ever in Chesed! More like the Qlipoth.

Firmin initially conceives of himself as suspended on the Sephoritic Tree between the two unities of Chesed (Mercy) and Binah (Understanding) which are situated at two ends over the Qlipoth; for him the leap from one to the other appears unbridgeable, and at the close of the novel the actual abyss will also prove unbridgeable for he will discover that his balancing and teetering have finally given way and he has 'fallen'; furthermore, the path to the Farolito will also, within a pseudo-quest context, prove 'all-but-unretraceable'. Firmin then goes on to deny that he ever had a position or hold on the tree in the first place,

conceiving of his stance as more akin to that of the Qlipoth: in Cabbalistic lore the Qlipoth represents the land of husks and demons, or Hell, and thus Geoffrey already thinks of himself as inhabiting at least a metaphorical abyss.

Yvonne too senses the ominous presence of the actual snaking ravine as it meanders through the countryside, for example, during her morning ride with Hugh she peers 'down the ravine with a shudder'(104). Whereas the Consul possesses an inquisitive ambiguous response to the barranca Yvonne's reaction towards it is of purely instinctive fright. Lowry may wish to posit the idea that this abhorrence of the landmark is, in Yvonne's case, subconsciously connected to the moment when, as a child actress, she'd experienced 'the real terror ... [of having] been caught in a ravine with two hundred stampeding horses'(262) - her having been caught in an abyss mirrors Geoffrey's having been 'caught' in the Hell Bunker. Although Yvonne does not perish in the barranca itself but in the adjoining woods, because of her final reinvolvement with a stampeding horse, at the point of death she conceives of herself as being 'in a ravine down which a million horses were thundering'(336).<sup>16</sup> Just as the Consul is ~~to~~ metaphorically join Yvonne in death by thinking of himself in a 'forest' (376), so Yvonne becomes reunited with the Consul by thinking of herself in a ravine.

Hugh's attitude to the ravine is rather more jocular and less immediate and personal than that expressed by either the Consul or Yvonne, nevertheless some of his responses to the abyss

cast interesting anticipatory light on the ultimate fate of his half-brother. In Chapter Four he glibly jokes with Yvonne that the ravine is 'chock full of defunct newspapermen, still spying through key-holes and persuading themselves the're acting in the best interests of democracy'(104): at Parian the Consul too will be termed a spy, whilst certainly one of the reasons he is cast into the barranca (i.e. killed) is because he obviously carries Hugh's anti-Fascist news telegram in the pocket of his jacket.

It seems strategically apt that the word 'ravine'(376) forms the final word of Lowry's text (apart from the garden sign epilogue that is) for much of the preceding action is geared towards the moment when the Consul is tossed down it at the very end; as such the use of the term 'fall' acts in a related context to foreshadow the final act of the narrative and, in this sense, the ravine and the garden sign finally become conveniently related by nature of a fall/Fall parallel. In his garden in the early morning the Consul conceives of the 'doomed men' about to enter a cantina and then is rendered as having 'almost fallen backwards on to his broken green rocking-chair'(75); later on in the garden Firmin thinks of the Farolito but decides that there isn't much chance of going there as 'the day offered too many immediate - pitfalls'(134) and a second later Lowry describes Geoffrey as having 'almost fallen into the barranca'(134): at the Salon Ofelia the Consul observes a small stream racing 'over an artificial falls' only to 'los[e] its identity' by merging into the barranca'(286). (On the subsequent page Yvonne says the scene before her evokes 'the Horseshoe Falls in Wales'(287): not only is the Consul imminently to fall but a horse-shoe, or two, is also literally about to fall on Yvonne.)

Already in Chapter One Laruelle reveals two of the purposes of the barranca: 'here was finality indeed, and cleavage' (21). Indeed, in terms of the Consul and Yvonne, the barranca will finally be seen to encompass both conditions: finality for their individual existences; cleavage of their mutual relationship. T. Bareham suggests that one of the innumerable symbolic uses to which Lowry puts his ravine is as a 'paradigm of a ... schism between the forces of love and of destruction'.<sup>17</sup> Various schisms inform Lowry's novel: a schism between the forces of love and destruction becomes suggested in the symbol of the split rock, a photograph of which Yvonne and the Consul see as they return home from the Hotel Bella Vista. Lowry had earlier announced that Yvonne's long-awaited return does not necessarily imply that her marriage has been healed: 'Divorce. What did the word really mean? She'd looked it up in the dictionary on the ship: to sunder, to sever. And divorced meant: sundered, severed'(54). The split-rock reinforces, symbolically, the definitions of divorce Yvonne has encountered on the ship. Lowry proclaims his theme by having the shop 'divided' from the palace by a 'steep narrow street desperate as a winze'(59);<sup>18</sup> and he informs us he is, by implication, telling us something about the Consul's marriage by allowing 'wedding invitations' and 'prints of extravagantly floriferous brides' to provide 'added ironic poignance'(59). Such supporting material clusters around the dominant image of the 'great rock split by forest fires' into 'several halves'(59). At the end of the day, at the Farolito, the Consul actually finds himself confronted with a 'split rock'(339), the rock now perhaps again appearing to suggest that his severance from ~~from~~ Yvonne is complete. The Consul thinks of the barranca running back through the country to his garden and then recalls standing

with Yvonne outside the printer's shop in the early morning, and thinks: 'How long ago, how strange, how sad, remote as the memory of first love ... it seemed'(340): in the above series of associations, not only is the split rock compared to the barranca, but Geoffrey, by evoking the memory of first love, perhaps once again also draws Leasowe's Hell Bunker into the scheme where a liaison (possibly with his first love?) was interrupted by Jacques; and, as such, love and rift or schism become inexorably associated in the Consul's mind, as they are inexorably associated in our mind through Lowry's constant ingenious superimposition of relevant images.

On the road to Tomalin Hugh has the following series of thoughts:

Why were there volcanic eruptions? people pretended not to know. Because, they might suggest tentatively, under the rocks beneath the surface of the earth, steam, its pressure constantly rising, was generated; because the rocks and the water, decomposing, formed gases, which combined with the molten material from below; because the watery rocks near the surface were unable to restrain the growing complex of pressures, and the whole mass exploded; the lava flooded out, the gases escaped, and there was your eruption - But not your explanation. No, the whole thing was a complete mystery still. In movies of eruptions people were always seen standing in the midst of the encroaching flood, delighted by it. Walls fell over, churches collapsed, whole families moved away their possessions, in a panic, but there were always these people, jumping about between the streams of molten lava, smoking cigarettes ... (242-43).

I have quoted the passage at some length in that it casts interesting light on a variety of geological strands which imbue Under the Volcano, contributing to the various 'strata' of meaning. Hugh conceives of rising pressures and throughout the day various metaphorical pressures could also be said to rise 'until they erupt in the events

pertaining to the Volcano's finale; he then goes on to conceive of his explanation as inadequate, terming the whole thing a complete mystery still and such a 'reading' of the situation also conforms to the novel's conclusion - there is an eruption of sorts yet just how it comes about does remain a sort of mystery. In the final part of the quotation Hugh goes on to think about people 'in movies',<sup>19</sup> delighting in the disaster around them nonchalantly stepping between the lava, smoking cigarettes; and, in a way, here he unconsciously describes his own role in terms of the approaching catastrophe for, when it arrives, Hugh is also made to appear largely oblivious and unconcerned; indeed, ironically, when confronted with the imminent catastrophe of the dying Indian by the wayside Hugh approaches the man whilst smoking a cigarette; furthermore, he side-steps the issue at hand as if he were jumping about trying to avoid a head-on collision with a stream of molten lava.

Lowry's employment of the volcanic terrain of central Mexico extends far beyond its usage as a casual, if exciting, setting. Both volcano and ravine are forever impinging themselves onto a variety of predicaments in the novel; eventually both become relevant to the narrative's denouement. Corresponding to the 'gap between'(63) the top of the volcano and the bottom of the ravine is a massive symbolical territory in which Lowry uses the full spectrum his landscape imagery allows him; forever accruing various nuances which ultimately assist in drawing the two dialectical extremes closer together.

VOLCANO, RAVINE, GEOLOGY - NOTES

1. - Indeed 'Quahnahuac' was the pre-conquest name for Cuernavaca.
2. - Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography (London, 1974), p.215.
3. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters (London, 1967), p.66.
4. - The ladder is another symbol for ascent yet, ironically, some of the ladders seem precarious and dangerous: strolling through the Borda gardens Laruelle perceives the steps of the swimming pool 'torn away and hanging by one rotting clamp'(20); in Chapter Eleven Yvonne too is in the process of climbing a 'mildewed ladder' (334) but finds 'her footing ... give way'(335) and she falls. Lowry seems to suggest that real ascent out of the world of 'Under' the Volcano is sometimes difficult to achieve.
5. - Stephen Spender, 'Introduction' to Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano (London, 1965), p.xiv.
6. - George Woodcock, 'The Own Place of Mind: An Essay in Lowrian (sic) Topography', in The Art of Malcolm Lowry, edited by Anne Smith (London, 1978), p.119.
7. - Sherrill E. Grace, 'Malcolm Lowry and the Expressionist Vision', in The Art of Malcolm Lowry. p.105.
8. - As such the single volcano now emanates the dichotomy that was earlier suggested by the 'pure cone' of Popocatepetl and the 'jagged peaks' of Ixtaccihuatl.
9. - The Consul too smokes both a pipe as well as cigarettes.
10. - In point of fact, unlike his father, the Consul does not disappear totally at death to be lost without trace in the depths of the barranca, for in Chapter One Laruelle informs us that the Consul 'had been "discovered" '(14). This discovery of Firmin's body is perhaps meant to parallel Jacques' discovery of his friend in the Hell Bunker of the Leasowe golf-course.
11. - David Markson, 'Myth in Under the Volcano', Prairie Schooner. XXXVII, 4 (Winter, 1963-64), p.345.
12. - The Consul's grotesque idea that he could be transported to the summit of the volcano in an ambulance proves, in the context of the preceding narrative, also latently ambiguous. On one level the ambulance, with its cross

painted on its side, might suggest salvation on both a local as well as a Christian plane. On another level the Consul's wish may be regarded as purely self-deceptory as he shares a similar sordid death to that of the Indian by the wayside for whom not only would no Good Samaritan halt but no ambulance either; indeed, on the roadside, someone 'chim[es] in [with] the rumour that the Servicio de Ambulancia had been suspended'(247,48), which, if true (Lowry, by terming the suggestion the product of a rumour makes it inherently ambiguous) denies the Indian, and implicitly also the Consul, their last chance. Firmin's summoning of the ambulance at the point of death also provides his final day with yet another neat circle for when we encounter him in the early morning he has just left the Red Cross Ball.

13. - Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, p.327.
14. - Much of the confusion concerning Under the Volcano's 'message' (which I personally don't believe it possesses; certainly not a single message anyway) would seem to be brought about by the incorrect equation that death means hell.
15. - Dante, The Divine Comedy: Hell, trans. Dorothy L.Sayers (Harmondsworth, 1972), p.181.
16. - A thunderstorm accompanies the deaths of both Yvonne and the Consul which, of course, more or less occur simultaneously.
17. - T. Bareham, 'Paradigms of Hell: Symbolic Patterning in Under the Volcano', in On the Novel, edited by B.S. Benediktz (London, 1971), p.118.
18. - Many of the 'steep narrow streets' in the ancient town of Quahnahuac come to resemble the barranca. Later in this study I compare a piece of description of the Consul and Yvonne negotiating a claustrophobic thoroughfare with a section of Dante's Inferno - see Labyrinths.
19. - Hugh's thoughts about seeing a volcanic eruption on film may once again suggest that Under the Volcano itself can be regarded as a sort of film.



GARDENS AND PARADISES

Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not take  
Towards the door we never opened  
Into the rose-garden. My words echo  
Thus, in your mind.  
    But to what purpose  
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves  
I do not know.  
    Other echoes  
Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?

Eliot, 'Burnt Norton', Four Quartets.

Few, if any critics of Under the Volcano who have  
attempted a general analysis of the novel have failed to comment

upon or draw conclusions from Lowry's use of the symbol of the garden. Douglas Day sets the tone of much of the related criticism when he writes:

The ohthonic imagery is, already, archetypally demonic in nature: that is, it employs the traditional affirmative images of the Mount of Perfection, the fertile valley, the cleansing stream or fountain and the blossoming garden,<sup>1</sup> but employs them in an inverted ironic form.

Although Day is correct in noting that much of the imagery of Under the Volcano is demonic, much of it is also paradisaical; furthermore, the 'traditional affirmative images', of which Day speaks, are equally tangible and solid in the novel, and not just simply present in order to become ironically counterbalanced by the negative or infernal aspects. Dorosz writes that 'the image of the garden brings into relief the transformation of life into death';<sup>2</sup> although this statement is again partially true, at the same time the text itself also denies the observation, for the Volcano's gardens (especially the Consul's) are teeming with life of all sorts. Although some plants are dying through lack of water (a metaphor for the Consul dying through lack of it too) they are simultaneously stretching themselves, striving to obtain 'liquid' and also, albeit obscenely, flowering (a metaphor for the Consul living life to the full, ascending).<sup>3</sup> As such, although the image of the garden does frequently bring into relief the transformation of life into death it also equally, in a way, brings into relief the transformation of death into life. The volcano and the ravine thrive as dynamic symbols in Under the Volcano because of a relationship based on dichotomy; such a dialeccttinal stance is also offered by the symbol

of the garden which itself is frequently made to harbour conflicting possibilities of meaning at virtually the same time.

Kilgallin, in his Lowry, does not attempt to categorise the garden/paradise theme as being solely related to a mono-dimensional Adamic undercurrent, a conclusion towards which Day's and Dorosz's remarks pertain, when he notes that 'Geoffrey's Lost Paradise owes more to concepts of Eden in Shaw, Voltaire and Henry Rousseau than to Milton's Fall'.<sup>4</sup> It is not my intention to examine the literary and visual influences of Lowry's employment of the garden metaphor; suffice to say that Kilgallin's observations act as a timely reminder of the inherent depth and complexity behind the varied appearances of the garden and paradise throughout the novel. In his letter to Cape Lowry himself writes that

The Cabbala is sometimes considered as the garden itself, with the Tree of Life, which is related of course to that Tree the forbidden fruit of which gave one the knowledge of good and evil, and ourselves the legend of Adam and Eve, planted within it ... and they are certainly at the root of most of our knowledge, the wisdom of our religious thought, and most of our inborn superstitions as to the origin of man. <sup>5</sup>

Lowry's own acknowledgement that the garden could be seen as a representation of the whole of the Cabbala, plus his philosophical/anthropological musings as to further potential ramifications of the Edenic implications, again reveals something of the density and profundity of the symbol within the context of his fiction. As the novel progresses the garden, as is the case with much (if not most) of the novel's other chthonic imagery, to borrow Day's term, is made

a repository for a host of varied, and frequently conflicting, 'meanings': its employment throughout the text becomes mythically based on the Edenic theme; also, as Lowry himself informs us, on the Cabbala; and also, to some possible extent, on the quest myth of the Fisher King archetype; furthermore, the symbol's use is further complicated by it being given a historical analogue of sorts in the ruined gardens of Maximilian and Carlotta. The versatile and untamed flora of Mexico's natural world is made to become either tamed and tended within the gardens, or left to sprout and flower freely, as in the Consul's domain as well as in other unkempt areas, Lowry often allowing for an interplay between the two alternatives within the framework of his overall employment of the garden symbol - a symbol which becomes frequently activated, so to speak, on a real level, by way of numerous references: to the private gardens of Quahnahuac, such as Firmin's and Quincey's; to the nearby public gardens which strategically verge on Geoffrey's own property; to the Borda Gardens of the nineteenth century Austrian emperor; even to the famous Jardin Xicotancatl, advertised, and thereby brought to the protagonists (and our) attention, on posters everywhere. In a sense the garden, like the Dante-esque dark wood, could be said to set the scene for all subsequent action for the novel begins in the grounds of a hotel 'surrounded by gardens'(9).

Leaving behind the desolate splendour which pervades the gardens and terraces of the almost deserted 'Hotel Casino de la Silva', the reader is, a few chapters later, invited to lose himself amongst the briars of the Consul's own personal garden with its desiccated and withered roses and wilting plumbago plants all

ultimately becoming suggestive of a 'collective desolate fecundity' (70). The Consul, rather naively, terms his garden a 'rajah mess' (70), going on to claim that he's 'been virtually without a gardener at all for months' though 'Hugh pulled up a few weeds' (70). At this stage, as at many others, the garden becomes yet another active symbol for the Consul himself. However, Hugh's brief 'weeding' exercise has only assisted in restoring some order, on a metaphorical level, to Firmin's condition; soon after her arrival Yvonne also makes a half-hearted attempt to 'lift a tentacle from a trumpet vine' (71) but, ultimately, her bit of gardening too does not amount to very much. Soon both Yvonne and Hugh are to leave the garden/Geoffrey behind in a search of a more orderly paradise and one not openly impinged upon by the negative presence of the Consul. Kilgallin suggests:

As a Fisher King, Geoffrey mirrors the land and its 'staggering' (70) plants that seem to be 'struggling like dying voluptuaries in a vision to maintain some final attitude of potency' (70). ... The curse on the land and ruler, to continue the Fisher King analogy, can only be removed by the appearance of a knight who will ask the meanings of the various symbols displayed to him. Hugh [however] will be more knight erring than knight errant. <sup>6</sup>

(Indeed Hugh's attempt at a 'weedkiller', as it were, to remedy the Consul's predicament consists of 'some malevolent strychnine compound' (66) with which, as Geoffrey informs Yvonne, his half-brother has been 'trying to "straighten [him] out"' (66); ironically, the 'poor old Consul', <sup>7</sup> to employ Lowry's own affectionate term, only ends up 'straightened out' in the metaphorical coffin of the abyss.) <sup>8</sup>

Interestingly, the garden, even to the Consul himself, becomes more cluttered and ruined as soon as the hallucinatory effect of alcohol on his system begins to diminish in intensity; at one point, Lowry renders 'an indescribable confusion of briars from which the Consul averted his eyes: the pleasant evanescent feeling of tightness was wearing off'(72,73). When completely drunk the Consul finds an affinity in the wrecked surroundings of his garden; when sobering up the garden possibly metaphorically represents the fruits of his own excesses and he comes to realise the damage to which he has subjected himself.

Nevertheless, the Consul's own absolutely wrecked garden only mirrors most of the surrounding vegetation itself, just as his little swimming-pool mirrors the 'inverted reflections of banana trees, and birds'(147). Ever since the twin departures of both Yvonne and the gardener the plants in his garden, just like many of those uncared for in the surrounding countryside (or wilderness), have been condemned to suffer 'an evil phallic death'(70). The sexual imagery Lowry employs to illustrate the 'syphilitic' death of the Consul's plants undoubtedly relates to Geoffrey's own impotence when he attempts to make love to Yvonne.<sup>9</sup> Just before the attempted love scene Yvonne says, rather dramatically: 'Geoffrey, this house has become somehow evil'(88). Ironically, later in the day Firmin is capable of consummating the sexual act with the prostitute Maria: she leads him 'irresistibly out into the garden ... it reminded him queerly of his own house'(348). At the end of the day the evil phallic death of the plants in his garden becomes mirrored in Firmin's 'burning boiling crucified evil organ'(350); and, in a sense, his liaison with Maria, followed by

his murder, also amounts to a sort of evil phallic death.<sup>10</sup>

The Consul's death (at the hands of the Chief of Gardens) is already anticipated in another way also in a description of some unused tools which lie around beyond a fence adjacent to his property: 'unusual tools, a murderous machete, an oddly shaped fork, somehow nakedly impaling the mind'(132). On the immediate level, in their context within Chapter Five, these tools are made present to give the Consul 'certain evidence of work left uncompleted'(132), for slightly earlier, having just fortified himself with a drink, the Consul considers that the garden 'did not strike him as being nearly so "ruined" as it had earlier appeared'(131). Yet soon, the little vision of order which the Consul has of his land cruelly fades out and leaves him alone and isolated under the untenable burden of responsibility. (Again later, in the final pages of the novel, the Consul's pilgrimage to the Farolito also assumes in his mind assense of order and logical pattern; once there though he is eventually confronted by a murderous machete and shot outside the Farolito in 'its little public garden'(340).) In reality, of course, the Consul's garden harbours chaos (as as his precarious visit to the Farolito also implicitly harbours chaos): a pariah dog follows him into it as he passes through its broken gate; Pathos the cat dies under mysterious circumstances there; the corrupt 'serpent' wriggles around amongst its weeds. When staring from his garden earlier in the morning Firmin notices that in another garden someone 'was slashing his way through some tall grasses, clearing the ground for a badminton court, yet something about his innocent enough occupation contained a horrible threat against him'(80). The threat of order from outside is reintroduced later when Firmin

observes his neighbour's garden with its immaculately kept 'green lawns ... at the moment being sprinkled by innumerable small whizzing hoses[which] swept down parallel with his own briars'(135). (Lowry making the hoses sweep down parallel with the Consul's briars so that the two gardens should in general also be paralleled or compared.)

The threat of order merges with the threat of eviction when, during a reconnaissance trip to the far end of his 'jungle', Firmin discovers that his own property is separated by a wire fence <sup>11</sup> from the adjacent public garden in which he makes out a sign with the following words inscribed on it:

LE GUSTA ESTE JARDIN?  
QUE ES SUYO?  
EVITE QUE SUS HIJOS LO DESTRUYAN! (132)

Here Lowry's garden metaphor attains an added level of implication, for the Consul's garden, which has already been defined as a perverted mockery of Quincey's domain, is further compared to the public grounds 'which seemed carefully and lovingly kept'(132). Both Quincey's garden and the public one represent a vision of Eden before the Fall. Geoffrey mistranslates the last line of the sign (see also Motifs) into 'We evict those who destroy'(132) and thus comes to ironically characterise his own predicament as that of Adam expelled from Paradise. Within the complex and ambivalent world of Under the Volcano the mythic equation is not as mono-dimensional as it may at first appear, for one could easily argue that the agents who maintain their gardens in some state of immaculate order constitute, in point of fact, those who are the



destroyers; such a reading becomes logically enhanced or confirmed at the time of the narrative's outcome: amongst the 'tools' the Consul observes in the neat public garden is a 'murderous machete' (132), whilst at the Farolito it is the Chief of Gardens who presides over the Consul's execution, Lowry making the equation that it is the gardeners, those attempting to maintain 'order' by any means available, who are the genuine destroyers and thus more deserving of being evicted.<sup>12</sup> That the public garden also closely bears the marks of corruption becomes demonstrated in another couple of rather obvious ways: firstly, the barranca itself, the gateway to hell, bisects the terrain; and secondly, the Consul briefly sees a figure there, 'the details of whose dress he did not have time to make out before it departed' (134). (Precisely who this figure is becomes revealed only some hundred pages further into the text, when the garden with its sign, this time translated correctly, becomes by-passed on the early stages of the bus ride to Tomalin, and immediately afterwards Lowry renders 'in the garden ... a man sitting alone on a stone bench ... [who] was apparently the devil himself, with a huge dark red face and horns, fangs and his tongue hanging out over his chin, and an expression of mingled evil, lechery and terror' (235).)

To return however to Lowry's ploy of identifying the Consul with Adam: in this potential scenario the seducing voice of his own alcohol-obsessed mind becomes Firmin's Eve; the traditional emblem of corruption, the forbidden fruit is metamorphosed into the hidden tequila bottle; a snake conveniently wriggles up a nearby pear-tree; and the American bourgeois Quincey bears resemblance to the omnipresent God. The Consul's own self-aware

'reading' of the biblical parallel becomes presented as follows:

I've often wondered whether there isn't more in the old legend of the Garden of Eden, and so on, than meets the eye. What if Adam wasn't really banished from the place after all? ... What if his punishment really consisted ... in his having to go on living there, alone, of course - suffering, unseen, cut off from God ... (137)

Firmin's identification with Adam vindicates him, in a sense, from being the vehicle of corruption, for in Genesis it is of course Eve who is the first to succumb to temptation. (In Lowry's perpetual twisting and manipulation of the myth there is constantly, as he ~~in~~ in fact makes the Consul say, more than meets the eye.)

In Chapter One, Laruelle, passing the Consul's house and seeing a light in the window, thinks: 'for long after Adam had left the garden the light in Adam's house burned on'(28). In a sense the Consul's identification with Adam 'having to go on living' becomes fulfilled for a year after his death his old friend is still thinking about Geoffrey's presence; that the Consul dies on the Day of the Dead when the dead are said to commune with the living confirms such a reading. (Moreover, the Consul of course is condemned to go on living eternally within the fiction that is Under the Volcano, his last day replayed again and again whenever the book is read.)

The Consul's garden offers the novel's garden metaphor at its succinct apotheosis; nevertheless, the inherent barriers of the Consul's domain become broken down as Lowry projects the processes of ruination onto the Mexican landscape in general; as such the Firmin's own garden becomes constantly mirrored, anticipated and

commented upon by nature of the gardens and semi-gardens of the surrounding terrain. When Laruelle visits the decaying Borda Gardens, during his prolonged act of bidding farewell to Quahnahuac, his opinion of the deserted terrain soon deviates from pure objectivity and his personal impression comes to underline both the demise of a previous civilisation as well as introducing many thematic repercussions relevant to the conditions which dominate the present:

The broken pink pillars, in the half-light, ~~that~~ might have been waiting to fall down on him: the pool covered with green scum, its steps torn away and hanging by one rotting clamp, to close over his head. The shattered evil-smelling chapel, overgrown with weeds, the crumbling walls, splashed with urine, on which scorpions lurked - wrecked entablature, sad archivolt, slippery stones covered with excreta - this place, where love had once brooded, seemed part of a nightmare. (20)

The totally wrecked garden comes to personify a sense of evil or corruption. It becomes a total symbol for life or the world or the human condition in general, deliberately echoing perhaps, although in a more 'tangible' way, Hamlet's metaphor:

O God, God,  
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
Fie on't, ah fie, 'tis an unweeded garden  
That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature  
Possess it merely. 13

Nevertheless, in Under the Volcano, no single viewpoint, no matter how poignant, is allowed to predominate. Lowry's symbols achieve their multi-layered complexity in that they rarely, if ever, present

a constant non-changing definition. When Hugh and Yvonne pay a strategic visit, during their bright and jaunty ride, to the same ruins Laruelle is to frequent a year and seven hours or so later, the morbid tone of decay and destruction dominant in Chapter One is totally removed - the nightmare now transformed to a kind of midsummernight's dream:

Hugh ... glanced absently round the place, which appeared so reconciled to its own ruin no sadness touched it; birds perched on the blasted towers and dilapidated masonry over which clambered the inevitable blue convolvulus; the foals with their guardian dog resting near were meekly grazing in the chapel: it seemed safe to leave them ... (127)

In that Lowry provides the reader with a picture of the Borda gardens seen from two conflicting perspectives he does so because he perhaps wishes to underline the mutual symbiotic existence which lies at the heart of his exploration of man's relationship to his environment; moreover, he invites the reader to select which perspective he prefers, or rather, he makes him aware that both options correspond equally to either particular system of order which, at any given point, is deemed preferable.

Earlier in Chapter Four Hugh and Yvonne ride through some parkland apparently belonging to the Quahnahuac brewery:

They had emerged on the outermost edge of what looked like a spacious, somewhat neglected park, spreading down on their right, or what had once been a huge grove, planted with lofty majestic trees ... The grove seemed to be irrigated by artificially banked streams, which were choked with leaves - though by no means all the trees were deciduous and underneath were frequent dark pools of shadow - and was lined with walks ... They rode past a dried-up fountain below some broken steps, its basin filled with twigs and leaves. (115-16)

In his analysis of Under the Volcano in his Biography, Douglas Day speaks of 'haunting instances of affirmation, like the halcyon terrain of Chapter Four, in which Hugh and Yvonne ride through greatly sloping fields across a cool stream to reach a tranquil and orderly park'.<sup>14</sup> Far from being an orderly park, as Day defines it, this garden would seem to emanate visible signs of decay and disorder: already neglected, its streams are choked with leaves and its fountain (life force?) dried up; moreover, it possesses some broken steps which may remind one of the torn-away steps noticed by Jacques in the Borda gardens.<sup>15</sup> Day, like many other critics, attempts to schematize Lowry's vision, though ends up, it would seem, merely rather confused, precisely because Lowry's symbols don't allow for a rigid doctrinaire interpretation. Day terms Lowry's imagery 'archetypally demonic',<sup>16</sup> and then goes on to attempt to demonstrate an affirmation of tranquility and order by selecting a section of the text which veers on a demonic portrayal (if not exactly an 'archetypal' one). Day's purpose, supposedly, in hoping to show that Hugh's and Yvonne's ride through the countryside around Quahnahuac is affirmative or idyllic (throughout these pages I too often term the ride in Chapter Four 'idyllic' in that the adjective provides a kind of shorthand for describing what Hugh and Yvonne, especially the latter, after all seem to sometimes feel about the event) is to contrast their 'perfect' environment with the imperfect environment which surrounds the Consul in his unweeded garden, yet the distinction is far from clear-cut: Hugh rides over 'a dead garter snake' (115); he thinks that 'No peace I shall ever find but will be poisoned as these moments are poisoned' (111), the term poison also evoking the

snake;<sup>17</sup> he and Yvonne come across equally wrecked, dried-up, unweeded terrain to that which constitutes Firmin's garden; and furthermore, both Hugh and Yvonne could be said to betray Geoffrey by seeking gratification through each others' company, just as the Consul betrays himself by seeking gratification through his hidden tequila bottle. At one point Lowry records that 'Hugh was pleased to see that Yvonne rode cowboy-fashion, jammed to the saddle, and not, as Juan Cerillo put it, "as in gardens"(109) - although she may not ride as if in a garden Yvonne is, nonetheless, in a garden of sorts; a restricted (both literally and metaphorically) domain which is equally comparable to a corrupt Eden avidly watched over by 'God' as is the Consul's property - indeed in the very next sentence after the one quoted above Lowry writes: 'The prison [my italics] was now behind them and he [Hugh] imagined themselves jogging into enormous focus for the inquisitive binoculars up there on the watchtower'(109). (In Chapter One some thoughts Laruelle has about Maximilian and Carlotta would seem to also become applicable to the Consul and Yvonne, as, indeed in part, they are, yet perhaps the comparison is even more pertinent to the condition and surroundings of Hugh and Yvonne in Chapter Four: 'And yet, how they must have loved this land, these two lonely empurpled exiles, human beings finally, lovers out of their element - their Eden, without either knowing quite why, beginning to turn under their noses into a prison and smell like a brewery'(20) - leaving behind the prison Hugh and Yvonne find themselves in the decaying grounds of the brewery!)

Throughout Under the Volcano various implications

various gardens and pseudo-gardens possess forever change before our eyes as if indeed we too were making a tour of them on horseback. The multifarious perspectives with which Lowry endows his gardens are made all the more multifarious when the narrative dwells in the kindred territory of the 'paradise'.

Lowry's text is littered with innumerable references to different sorts of 'Paradise', yet rarely, if ever, do they provide a coherent picture of an ideal venue of bliss and happiness. Instead Lowry constantly undercuts any inherent paradisaical concept by continually drawing attention to the disparity which appears to exist between the actual 'real' events of his narrative and the imaginary dreamscapes which invariably constitute the protagonists' visions of a happy or interesting 'other' world. In Chapter One, for example, the artistically-minded Laruelle conceives of Mexico itself as a product of three different civilisations; then perplexed and confused by the comparative possibilities of the different types of landscape he sees around him: 'the Cotswolds, Windermere, New Hampshire, the meadows of the Eure-et-Loire, even the grey dunes of Cheshire, even the Sahara' (15, 16), he goes on to term the terrain's beauty 'fatal or cleansing ... the beauty of the Earthly Paradise itself' (16). Idealistically, the constituent visual elements of the Mexican terrain could easily coalesce into a paradisaical setting, yet the impingement of man on the scene must needs allow for a subjective response to the environment; thus, Laruelle terms the surroundings both cleansing and fatal, once more relativising the stance or position any paradise holds within the text and again inviting the individual reader to unravel the implicit layers of irony.

Later in the novel Yvonne renders Laruelle's 'paradise' a product of the past (though, 'ironically', Laruelle is to have his thoughts a year into the future). She crosses Geoffrey's garden, 'pausing every few steps to uproot some weed or other until, suddenly, she stop[s], gazing down at a flower-bed that [is] completely grossly strangled by a coarse green vine', exclaiming: 'My God, this used to be a beautiful garden. It was like Paradise'(101,02). After months of neglect the garden has deteriorated into one of ruin and decrepitude (thus mirroring many of the other locales in the novel which have gone the same way, for example, the Casino de la Selva or the Borda gardens); it now only constitutes a type of mocking or inverted replica of Laruelle's paradisaal ideal; in another sense it is a vision of Eden after the Fall. Hugh glibly replies to Yvonne's statement about the condition of the garden by saying: 'Let's get the hell out of it then'(102). It is as a sort of hell, not Paradise, that the garden, within the context of Yvonne's and Hugh's subjective responses to it, is really to be regarded; Hugh and Yvonne leave the garden to search for an 'idyllic' haven elsewhere, yet only by having attempted to 'get the hell out of it' in the sense of removing or eradicating its negative aspects would a paradise, as it were, have been regained. Hugh and Yvonne's escape invariably proves only transitory and delusory.

Throughout the Volcano the position or stance which any potential paradise holds is frequently relativised by an accompanying contradictory set of values. Firmin, for example, thinking himself 'safe' in the Farolito (in fact, as we come to realise, he is anything but safe there) terms it a 'sanctuary,



the paradise of his despair'(339), its despairing aspect inevitably, of course, cancelling out its potential as a 'true' paradise. Earlier in the Salon Ofelia, he had deliberately shirked Yvonne's 'offers of a sober and non-alcoholic Paradise'(375), the point being that his and his ex-wife's notions of what constitutes a truly paradisaal predicament differ sharply - Yvonne wishes to be reconciled to a sober, dried-out Geoffrey, whilst the Consul himself prefers the isolation of a favourite cantina. Indeed, whilst Hugh and Yvonne had felt it necessary to free themselves from the claustrophobic atmosphere of Geoffrey's hellish garden he remains happy to potter around there; looking for hidden tequila bottles; musing over some thoughts about his Cabbalistic book; chatting with his neighbour; falling asleep, etc. In a way all the locations through which the Consul passes during the course of his final day could be labelled 'paradises of despair'.

The impossibility of a paradisaal state being realised on the Day of the Dead, 1938 in fact frequently becomes reinforced by the mere presence on (or behind) the scenes of the 'demonic' Consul (by this I mean by those aspects of his personality which Lowry draws in a particularly negative or 'occult' context; many of course derive from mythic archetypes which have little, if anything, to do with Firmin's own 'character'). Again Hugh and Yvonne's ride in Chapter Four, for example, becomes continually interrupted, or relativised, both by thoughts of Geoffrey himself as well as by subtle anticipations of his ultimate fate: 'Maybe he's a black magician'(122), Hugh muses; Firmin is compared to the demonic goat and armadillo; 'Target practice'(104) becomes ironically announced as shots ring out from 'under' the volcano; the ever-present

'Malebolge'(104) anticipates the Consul's approaching squalid, and in this context, 'hellish' fall.

Immediate or instant paradise is denied the protagonists of Under the Volcano by the harsh reality of events; even Laruelle, a year later, still thinks about his lost friends: 'for long after Adam had left the garden the light in Adam's house burned on'(28); moreover, he compares his own imminent 'expulsion' from Mexico to their respective demises. As such the main quartet of Lowry's novel each create for themselves an idealistic, individualistic picture of paradise which perfectly reflects their own personal desires and longings. Although isolated from the mainstream narrative by dislocations of time and place, these visions also often cast interesting light on the events of the Day of the Dead itself. The envisaged 'paradises' tend to be located either in the past, be it the distant 'mythical' past of Mexico's golden age, or that of Atlantis, or the nostalgic past of the protagonists' own lives: Laruelle's Leasowe, Hugh's adolescent sea voyage, Yvonne's Hollywood days; or in the future; in particular in the future of the northern dream-land which haunts Yvonne, and to some extent, also Hugh and the Consul.

Firmin, influenced by his knowledge of the Tlaxcaltecan civilisation in the guide book located, comically, within the confines of the Salon Ofelia lavatory, and nostalgically also recalling the time of his meeting and courtship of Yvonne's in Granada, soon conjures up a paradisaal picture of the white cathedral city of Tlaxcala. The Consul imagines it as completely deserted: 'there was nobody there, no one ... to interfere with

166.

the business of drinking, not even Yvonne, who so far as she was in evidence at all, was drinking with him'(303). Geoffrey's evocation of his ideal Tlaxcala undoubtedly shares some similarity with Bunyan's City of Bliss, yet the mass of uninterrupted white buildings, white sanctuaries and white towers also has a certain kind of nightmarish quality about it giving it equally something in common with the foreboding city depicted in Fritz Lang's Expressionist film Metropolis. Unlike Bunyan's City of Bliss, the remorseless agglomeration of white buildings, white sanctuaries and white towers proves to be completely devoid of any humanity except for Yvonne and the Consul. Carrying white bottles they happily walk through the bleak(?) and deserted parks along well-arranged avenues enjoying the healthier climate and the better air. Finally, however, the paradise is unmasked when the dream-town becomes revealed as a haven for drunkards: 'And in the town too were innumerable white cantinas, where one could drink for ever on credit, with the door open and the wind blowing'(304).

For the Consul no vision would appear to remain totally static in character. The dream landscapes of his mind arise out of an unquenchable thirst for alcoholic relief and thus soon acquire nightmarish dimensions in that they often finally break down or collapse when he spends too much time thinking about them and not enough time drinking sufficiently to maintain the vividness of his vision. The dream-land situated below the mythical mountain Himavat, which the Consul seems to first imagine in a state of total and merry inebriety, alternates according to the level of his drunkenness and the ensuing emotional tensions he experiences.

The paradisaal dream begins in the following vein:

Behind them walked the only living thing that  
shared their pilgrimage, the dog. And by degrees  
they reached the briny sea. Then, with souls  
well disciplined they reached the northern region,  
and beheld, with heaven aspiring hearts, the  
mighty mountain Himavat. (129)

Soon, however, Geoffrey's dream becomes transmogrified into another 'paradise of despair', the elements, this time on a literal level, turning against him:

Then the snow was not glistening, the fruit blossoms  
were not clouds, they were mosquitoes, the  
Himalayas were hidden by dust, and he was thirstier  
than ever. (129)

In this situation Lowry excels in heaping irony upon irony. Within a few lines the exotic and lavish grounds below Himavat become suddenly metamorphosed into a chaotic garden, whilst the pseudo-Miltonic panegyric on the theme of the thirst for light merely becomes replaced by yet another depiction of Firmin's endless thirst for alcohol.

Within an equally loosely ironical context, although within a very different actual context to the Consul's thoughts about a Cabbalistically-related paradise of his hermetic imagination, Spain comes to represent, for Hugh, if not exactly a paradise, then at least a type of dream-land where his desires are, he thinks, capable of materialising and flourishing.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Mexico herself, still in search of her true identity, Spain is rendered, in Hugh's

consciousness at least, as a place about to undergo a definite major phase in her development. As a man longing for adventure, Hugh can only visualise a northern retreat for the Consul and Yvonne, whilst his own dream is not of a land of harmony and security; rather, he conceives of a terrain of action where, face to face with danger, he is able to assert his own individuality. From an objective point of view, however, despair also inhabits this paradise for, during the Civil War, death lurks around every corner there always ready to take advantage of any unprepared victim before he has had the opportunity of attaining any lasting and meaningful fulfilment of his personality. The reason Hugh's pseudo-paradise is rendered ironical is because, like the other paradises of the other characters' dreams, it too proves unattainable. On his previous visit to Spain Hugh appears to have achieved very little apart from falling out of 'an ambulance there with ... two dozen beer bottles and five journalists on top of' (106) him;<sup>19</sup> moreover, when he intends to sail for Spain again Lowry posits the notion that he probably won't even reach the promised land for his ship will 'probably be blown to smithereens' (107). On the contingent level of the Day of the Dead, 1938 Hugh is to be found in a different hemisphere from his envisaged paradise; whilst he is enjoying himself the Loyalists are losing the Battle of the Ebro; whilst he sings revolutionary songs in the forest the Spain of his dreams is only romantically evoked by the chords strummed out on his newly-acquired acoustic guitar.

The only true Eden of sorts (although it is again

ironized - see below) in which it seems Lowry himself believed corresponds to the main protagonists' hopes of a northern paradise. Paradoxically enough, Hugh, the supposed man of action and frustrated emotion provides, within the context of the narrative proper, the first description:

The thing to do [he informs Yvonne] is to get out of Vancouver as fast as possible. Go down one of the inlets to some fishing village and buy a shack slap spang on the sea, with only foreshore rights, for, say a hundred dollars. Then live on it this winter for about sixty a month. No phone. No rent. No consulate. Be a squatter. Call on your pioneer ancestors. Water from the well. Chop your own wood. (125-26)

A genuine paradise, as Lowry imagines it, constitutes an escape from the banal everyday world and the subsequent threat of boredom; yet an escape which is actually possible to achieve. This Rousseauistic or Thoreauesque call for simplicity brings man into closer contact with other people who have adopted the same view of life: the fisherman, the boat-builder or the trapper - the 'real people'(126), as Hugh characterises them.

The Consul too is given a vision of a new land suggesting a momentary promise of light for him. The Consul describes the paradise in the letter written at the Farolito during a rather massive mescal binge. Critics often attempt to point out that if Firmin stopped drinking then the paradise he envisages would become obtainable, yet, in a sense, by drinking the paradise does become obtainable, for drink allows Geoffrey the opportunity of vividly imagining his northern landscape:

It is a light blue moonless summer evening, but late, perhaps ten o'clock, with Venus burning hard in daylight, so we are certainly somewhere far north, and standing on this balcony, from which beyond along the coast comes the gathering thunder of a long many-engined freight train, thunder because though we are separated by this wide strip of water from it, the train is rolling eastward and the changing wind veers for the moment from an easterly quarter, and we face east, like Swedenborg's angels ... (42)

Although the Consul writes to Yvonne that he has 'visions of a new life together we might somewhere lead'(42), the 'path' he sees 'between mescals'(42) would seem to be some kind of occult path which he also appears to wish (if he in fact does wish it in the first place) to pursue alone. Just before his death, having missed the opportunity of a new life, Geoffrey once more clings to his vision of the north:

British Columbia, the genteel Siberia, that was neither genteel nor a Siberia, but an undiscovered, perhaps an undiscoverable paradise, that might have been a solution ... (354)

By terming the paradise perhaps undiscoverable, the Consul realises that the actuality of escape with Yvonne was also merely the product of an illusion. In that Geoffrey believes himself to have climbed the volcano as he dies he finally announces that, for him, a believable paradise lies only at the end of his own lonely path.

As the novel progresses, Yvonne's paradisaal vision also gains in clarity and she thinks of a friendly home between the forest and the sea with a garden full of flowers and surrounded by snow-covered mountain peaks; a secure place, where she can lead a life of love

and simplicity. (Just as the Consul's character denies him ~~of~~ a paradisaical dreamland, so perhaps we are meant to speculate that the globe-trotting Yvonne is also simply engaging in a flight of fancy.) Eventually Yvonne destroys her paradise, or has it destroyed for her by her death; and, as such, Lowry implies that not just Adam/the Consul has been evicted from paradise, but also Eve/Yvonne.

Lowry's gardens and paradises again demonstrate themselves to be symbols which possess a massive potential significance in the lay-out of Under the Volcano in that they cannot be easily or glibly categorized; instead, they form a kind of dynamic sub-structure forever accruing added depth, and thus also organisational efficacy, by their ambivalent inter-dependence.



GARDENS AND PARADISES - NOTES

1. - Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography (London, 1974), p.329.
2. - Kristofer Dorosz, Malcolm Lowry's Infernal Paradise (Uppsala, 1976), p.115.
3. - In a way the thunderstorm and torrential downpour which accompanies the denouement of Under the Volcano, either purposely or accidentally, destroys the meticulously charted aridity theme: with the rain the plants in the Consul's garden dying of thirst become implicitly saved irrespective of human intervention; similarly too, Firmin himself may attain a god-given salvation (Geoffrey means 'god-given' - see Mirrorings) in spite of himself.
4. - Tony Kilgallin, Lowry (Erin, Ontario, 1973), p.170.
5. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters (London, 1967), p.71.
6. - Tony Kilgallin, Lowry, p.162.
7. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.85.
8. - Geoffrey's drinking habits often become aligned to obvious foreshadowings of his death: after partaking of the strychnine compound the Consul offers Yvonne a 'straight wormwood'(73) which again may be evocative of a coffin; later in his garden Firmin informs his neighbour that he is now 'on the wagon' to which Quincey replies: 'The funeral wagon, I'd say'(137).
9. - Further elaboration on the underlying sexual theme which dominates much of the garden description in the novel becomes provided by Laruelle in Chapter One when he recalls the Consul lending him the volume of Elizabethan plays 'In the Consul's garden [where] they drifted gloomily up and down among the roses and the plumbago and the waxplants "like dilapidated préservatifs" '(33).
10. - A connection between Edenic sexual knowledge after the Fall and the Consul's own 'fall' when he is shot is perhaps also foreshadowed or ornamented at a couple of points in the novel: at Laruelle's the Consul hears gun-fire coming, appropriately, from Parian and says to Jacques, 'Mass reflexes, but only the erections of guns, disseminating death'(211), whilst in his day-dream at the Salon Ofelia, recalls: 'Rows of dead lamps like erect snakes poised to strike'(284).
11. - In Chapter Nine Yvonne recalls her father's plantation being allowed to run 'into weeds and ruin'(260) and then the fact that he worked 'in a wire fence company'(261).

12. - In his garden the Consul speculates whimsically that 'perhaps Adam was the first property owner and God, the first agrarian, a kind of Cardenas ... kicked him out'(137). This political angle on the Biblical myth becomes in actuality reversed at the Farolito - there the Fascist (property-owning?) anti-Cardenas regime plays the God role, whilst Firmin (like the Indian before him) has to be kicked out for his left-wing, Marxist sympathies, which in the Consul's case, of course, are discovered by the chiefs by pure 'fatalistic' coincidence - he draws the map of Spain on the bar, he has in his possession Hugh's telegram, etc.
13. - William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act1, Sc.2,16. 132-37.
14. - Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, p.329.
15. - Broken, breaking or missing steps or stairs form a constant element of Lowry's work. His intention in portraying them, especially in Under the Volcano, is perhaps two-fold: firstly, they demonstrate or symbolise the impossibility of an easy passage between various 'levels' (Dante's journey too is often precarious); and secondly, they perhaps also show that connections or links not always possible or likely in the actual world (although, ironically, 'links', as between images of broken steps, are more feasible in the fictional world) - that it is, in fact, schism-ridden.
16. - See Note 1 above.
17. - By giving his half-brother a strychnine mixture, Hugh could, in a sense, be termed a poisoner and thus Lowry's identification of Hugh, in both his own and Geoffrey's eyes, with a snake - see Animals - proves apposite.
18. - Spain as potential paradise is denied in another way when we learn that the Consul and Yvonne plighted their troth at a tomb in the Generalife Gardens in Granada. (Ultimately they become separated when the Consul is 'ordered' into his tomb by the Chief (General) of Gardens.
19. - Two dozen (24) and five equal 29 - Hugh's age.

TREES, WOODS, FORESTS, JUNGLE

Through my glasses I saw the slope of a hill interspersed with rare trees and perfectly free from undergrowth. A long decaying building on the summit was half buried in the high grass; the large holes in the peaked roof gaped black from afar; the jungle and the woods made a background. There was no enclosure or fence of any kind; but there had been one apparently, for near the house half-a-dozen slim posts remained in a row, roughly trimmed, and with their upper ends ornamented with round carved balls. The rails, or whatever there had been between, had disappeared. Of course the forest surrounded all that.

Conrad, Heart of Darkness.

The terrain selected by Lowry in which to set his novel Under the Volcano is riddled with trees. From the depths of

the barranca, where 'Trees ... [grow] down into the gulch'(104), to the 'timberline of Popocatepetl'(80) trees of all sorts, types and shapes, are to be found more or less everywhere. Roger Cook writes that the 'Tree of Life, or Cosmic Tree, penetrates the three zones of heaven, earth and underworld, its branches penetrating the celestial world and its roots descending into the abyss'.<sup>1</sup> Thus the tree as a 'central' symbol of sorts readily fits in Lowry's own cosmological scheme penetrating and impinging itself upon both the literal as well as the ensuing symbolical areas of action.<sup>2</sup>

In his letter to Cape, Lowry himself amplifies on a couple of mythic interrelationships in which the image or symbol of the tree becomes overtly employed. Firstly, he draws attention to the Jewish Cabbala saying that it represents 'Man's spiritual aspirations' and that the 'Tree of Life ... is its emblem ... a kind of complicated ladder with Kether or Light, at the top and an extremely unpleasant abyss some way above the middle';<sup>3</sup> and secondly, of course, he says that the 'Tree of Life ... is related [to] the Tree [of] forbidden fruit'.<sup>4</sup> I cannot possibly hope to make it my purpose to analyse many of the Volcano's tree/trees references, and there are roughly some two hundred, in terms of extended explication by means of either the Cabbala or the Edenic myth (some aspects of which have after all already been partly analysed in my Myth and Gardens chapters). Suffice to say then that the symbol of the tree, as is the case with many of Lowry's symbols, achieves some of its 'penetrating' efficacy through its inherent mythological (or mystical) biases; biases which become instigated or brought to our attention by Lowry in a

variety of ways throughout Under the Volcano, and which thus become inherently brought into play whenever a tree appears in the text.<sup>5</sup>

Lowry would further appear to make the tree implicitly central to his action by drawing on and alluding to some aspects of myths concerning the Axis Mundi which itself uses the tree as a symbol for a preoccupation with a metaphorical location of the earth's epicentre. In his letter to Cape, Lowry defines Mexico, amongst other things, as 'the meeting place, according to some, of mankind itself';<sup>6</sup> later he says:

We can see it [Mexico] as the world itself, or the Garden of Eden, or both at once. Or we can see it as a kind of timeless symbol of the world on which we can place the Garden of Eden, the Tower of Babel and indeed anything else we please.<sup>7</sup>

Roger Cook would appear to cast further interesting light on a variety of key symbols used in Under the Volcano, in terms of Lowry's own apparent fascination with depicting a mythically timeless ~~land~~ <sup>and for the</sup> ~~Native~~ <sup>Native</sup>, when he informs us that the

idea of the cosmic axis and the 'centre of the world', which is extremely ancient (fourth or third millenium B.C.) and widely diffused, is embodied primarily in three images, which are to be found in a great variety of forms throughout the world. These are the Pillar or Pole, the Tree and the Mountain ... all three are represented in features derived from sacred architecture, and in particular from the pyramid-ziggurat (Egypt, Mesopotamia and Mexico) and the Buddhist stupa (India, East Asia).<sup>8</sup>

In Under the Volcano, Lowry makes Mexico a timeless symbol for the world itself, the 'meeting place, according to some,

of mankind itself',<sup>9</sup> as he writes in his letter to Cape. Furthermore, Lowry demonstrates his own awareness of the 'cosmic axis', to quote Cook, by actively incorporating the Mountain, the Pillar or Pole and the Tree into the framework of Under the Volcano and allowing them to function as dynamic and coherent symbols within his novel.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, he also, of course, refers to the Mexican pyramid which he relates, in a sense, to the Mesopotamian ziggurat, when he makes the Consul proclaim that the pyramid of Cholula 'was the original Tower of Babel'(17) - see also Towers. Cook also observes that the 'ladder or stairway {too} serves as a reminder of the many myths, rites and symbols of ascension associated with all symbols of the Axis Mundi'.<sup>11</sup> Within the context of Under the Volcano, the volcano (mountain) comes to represent a key and 'dominant' symbol for ascent and the tree performs its Cabbalistic role in the shape of a 'rigging' for an occult based spiritual ascent. Lowry too riddles his text with ladders and staircases, for example, those in Jacques' towers (see also below), whilst the pole is also made to become an active metaphor for the entire precarious business of ascent (a theme which permeates the novel) when the Consul catches a glimpse of a man 'half-way up [a] slippery pole, neither near enough to the top nor the bottom to be certain of reaching either in comfort'(228).

Just as Lowry transposes, by means of the Consul's Cholula/Babel reduction, a pyramid from the Old to the New World so, by also alluding to the Mexican Great Tree of Oaxaca, he furthers the range and complexity of his series of allusions to the Axis Mundi. The 2,000-year old tree, reputed to be the oldest living

thing in the Western Hemisphere and worshipped by the Mayans as a symbol of fertility,<sup>12</sup> is mentioned when the Consul tells Yvonne that after her departure he went to Oaxaca and asks if she remembers Oaxaca: in her instantaneous thoughts about the town she immediately summons up 'The roses and the great tree'(53). (Oaxaca's associations with the great tree become re-awakened later in the novel by means of a piece of word association in the Consul's, and Lowry's, ever-agile mind: 'That was Oakville. - But Oaxaca or Oakville, what difference?'(286))

Lowry possibly demonstrates further knowledge of ancient Mexican mythology and art when some of his trees appear to correlate rather well with those depicted on many Mayan pictures, where the tree, as in Under the Volcano, too possesses a multitude of symbolic functions. Cook cites a Mexican mosaic, the Mayer Fejervary Codex, discovered in Mixtec and dating before 1350, which shows trees depicting the five regions of the world:

The tragic ambiguities and polarities of existence in time and space open out from the centre. Birth, Life, Death and Regeneration are embodied in these trees of the cardinal directions. At the top (east), the tree of the rising sun standing between the god of that name and the god of sharp-cutting stone. To the right, the tree of sacrifice, between the maize-god and the Lord of the dead. At the foot of the picture, a tree surrounded by a humming-bird between the goddess of flowers and the goddess of drunkenness. Finally, split in the middle like a vulva, the tree of regeneration between the god of rain and the god of the underworld.<sup>13</sup>

In Under the Volcano the ambiguities and polarities of existence in time and space also appear to open out from the centre. Lowry refers to the ancient centre of the state, the capital Tlaxcala,

which possesses 'four clean and well-arranged avenues', each corresponding to the four cardinal directions and is 'covered by stricken in years trees'(298). Lowry's novel also implicitly deals with themes of birth, life, death and regeneration within its own series of overlapping cyclical frameworks. Moreover, Lowry may also directly refer to three of the trees of the cardinal directions in the context of his own fiction. The tree surrounded by a humming-bird may be evoked in the Consul's garden, where Firmin becomes aware of 'a lizard going up a tree, another kind of lizard coming down another tree, a bottle-green humming bird exploring a flower, another kind of humming-bird, voraciously at another flower' (143): on the mosaic the tree stands between the goddess of flowers and the goddess of drunkenness - not only does the humming-bird explore flowers but on the following page Yvonne arrives, her 'arms ... full of bougainvillaea'(144) to assume the role of flower goddess herself, whilst it may seem superfluous to add that the Consul is, of course, extremely drunk at this stage. Another tree depicted on the mosaic is the one of regeneration. In Chapter Eleven, in the forest, Yvonne comes across the eagle's cage set:

between the cantina and a low thick tree, really two trees embracing one another ... The intertwined roots of the two tree lovers flowed over the ground toward the stream, ecstatically seeking it; the roots might as well have stayed where they were, for all around them nature was out-doing itself in extravagant fructification. (320)

The single tree Yvonne sees, which is really made of two intertwined trees, demonstrates the split inherent <sup>in</sup> the regenerative tree: the fact that nature in extravagant fructification surrounds the tree may serve to suggest its own potentially regenerative properties,



whilst its search for the stream and the allusion to its roots may serve to render evocative its equi-distant stance between the gods of rain and the underworld; moreover, the chapter itself ends with a rain storm. Finally, throughout Under the Volcano, Lowry also alludes to various possible trees of sacrifice, the most obvious probably appearing at the very end of the novel when the Indian's white horse is to be found 'tied to a small tree'(354): in the course of the narrative Lowry seeks to closely identify Geoffrey with the horse (see Animals) and that identification is greatly strengthened in Under the Volcano's denouement, for the Consul is 'sacrificed', in part at least, because he frees the horse from the tree to which it is tethered; moreover, because of his action, Yvonne too could also be said to assume the guise of a sacrificial victim. In the mosaic the tree stands between the maize-god and the Lord of the dead, whilst as he stands by the horse tethered to the tree Firmin is made to adopt a similar position, his death, on the Day of the Dead, analogously becoming a kind of pagan harvest sacrifice.

It may not be coincidental that Lowry gives his white horse an open sore on the hipbone for by so doing he assists in identifying the animal with Christ on the cross, his side pierced by the centurion's spear. Lowry enlarges both his pattern of Christian correspondence, as well as his allusions to the tree of sacrifice, when various trees in the novel are openly made to evoke a cross. Cook writes that 'The Cross is homologized with the Tree of Life, which according to the scriptures stands at the centre of the Garden of Eden at the beginning of time and at the centre of the Heavenly City of Jerusalem at the end of time'.<sup>14</sup> Such a

connection between the Old and New Testament is also implicitly suggested in Lowry's novel in that, by identifying the Consul with both Adam and Christ, Firmin's garden comes to represent both Eden (before and after the Fall) as well as Christ's wilderness, in which he encounters the devil, and his Gethsemane. Adam and Christ are again simultaneously alluded to in a little incident at the fairground when the Consul notices a man 'nailing a board to a tree'(222), an act which suggests the crucifixion, whilst the notice on the board proclaims 'LE GUSTA ESTE JARDIN?'(223), thereby re-awakening the stern warning, already earlier encountered by Firmin in his garden, of eviction for those who destroy. The cross/crucifixion theme is skillfully maintained throughout the novel on various levels, for example: early in the morning the Consul and Yvonne encounter 'a carpenter, running past them wagging his head and carrying a sawed length of grained board under his arm' (58) who could well be the same man who at the fairground nails a board to the tree; later, just before Yvonne and Geoffrey reach the Consul's house, they pass a 'little church that had been turned into a school with the tombstones and the horizontal bar in the playground' (68), the horizontal bar perhaps again, especially set amongst 'church' and 'tombstones' as it is, suggesting the cross beam of the cross (just before they encounter Laruelle in the afternoon Yvonne, the Consul and Hugh again pass the same school, this time Lowry rendering 'the grey tombstones and the swing like a gallows'(191), another term for the cross being, as mentioned elsewhere, the gallows tree); on their way to Parian Yvonne and Hugh pass a 'notice nailed to a tree' (318) immediately prior to encountering the path itself splitting like a man being crucified (see also below). Throughout Under the Volcano, Lowry thus constantly enlarges his intention of rendering any

tree within his novel as 'central' by forever evoking associations between the tree and the symbol of the cross, itself central to Western Civilisation. In Chapter One Laruelle is described in the following terms: 'From the field he was crossing [my italics] he could see, over the trees on the slope of the hill'(16); the trees on the slope of the hill perhaps evoking an image of the three crosses on the hill of Calvary. Indeed, Laruelle notices the hill and its trees just before encountering 'the walls and towers of the outskirts'(17) of the town, a situation which perhaps recalls the first verse of the famous Easter hymn:

There is a green hill far away,  
Without a city wall,  
Where the dear Lord was crucified,  
Who died to save us all. 15

(Cook observes that 'modern historians think it highly unlikely that Christ was crucified on an actual cross. It was much more likely a simple stake, the cross being shaped more by the action of the myth than that of history'.)<sup>16</sup> Writing of Lowry's uncompleted and unpublished novel, La Mordida, William New notes that

in Mexico is the letter X, the cross which has been repeatedly emphasised in this work - next, Oaxaca, xopilotes, Crux (the southern Cross) - which Jung and others have identified with the element fire. As a symbol the cross carries the sense of conjoining forces, of a union of upper and lower worlds, as well as its related Christian implications. Dark as the Grave had ended with the discovery of cruciform tombs in Mitla. 17

The cross may certainly play a fundamental role in some of Lowry's post-Volcano work, as New perceptively observes; nevertheless it already occupies an important position within Under the Volcano

where both tree/cross, and mnemonic 'X' which represents them, are also repeatedly constantly.<sup>18</sup>

Addressing Mr. Quincey's cat, the Consul jokingly refers to it as his 'little *Xicotancatl*' [my italics](138).<sup>19</sup> He then says to his neighbour that the cat 'thinks I'm a tree with a bird in it'(138). This claim, in which Firmin openly (albeit drunkenly) personifies himself as a tree, reinforces the concept that Lowry has made the tree, like much else, become a dynamic symbol for the Consul himself throughout the narrative as a whole. In Chapter Six Geoffrey points out a tree to his half-brother, asking, 'Do you see that poor exiled maple tree outside there ... propped up with those crutches of cedar?', and going on to say: 'One of these days, when the wind blows from the other direction, it's going to collapse'(183). The Consul too is exiled; he is, in a sense, 'propped up', both by his drinking and also to some extent by some assistance from his friends; whilst he is also, 'one of these days' (actually on that same day), to finally collapse. As a potentially 'falling' tree, Geoffrey is also perhaps made to deny the idyllic vision Hugh has of Canadian paradise when, in his mind's eye, the younger Firmin imagines a scene in which 'occasionally a tree will come crashing down'(126), especially as the Consul personifies himself as an exiled maple tree and the maple leaf appears on the Canadian flag. Earlier in Chapter Four, as Hugh and Yvonne sit at an outside table, Hugh is made aware of a 'leaf [falling] off a tree somewhere behind them with a crash'(117) which may again constitute another ominous foreboding of the Consul's own imminent autumnal fall. Firmin's self destruction through alcohol is further explored in terms of the tree performing a symbolic role ~~the~~

for the Consul when he has a drink of tequila and feels 'the fire of the tequila run down his spine like lightning striking a tree' (219): again as a tree Firmin too will eventually be struck down by the fires of his own thirst for drink; appropriately, his death takes place during a thunderstorm, accompanied by lightning flashes. Again as a sort of struck-down tree the Consul becomes analogously implicated in the line from Marlowe's Doctor Faustus which Laruelle just 'happens' to locate upon opening the play: 'Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight'(40).

Lowry's attempts to make the tree central to his action bears fruit, so to speak, when his central protagonist, the Consul, becomes overtly symbolised by many of the actual trees (and their 'branches') which appear throughout the narrative. Earlier I compared the tree to the pole: in Chapter Four Yvonne and Hugh find themselves following the route marked out by some telegraph poles but then having to deviate leftwards, and Lowry writes that this change of direction 'was too much for the telegraph poles that strode straight ahead arrogantly and were lost from sight'(119); as the day progresses the Consul too will gradually stride ahead arrogantly until eventually he is also lost from sight. (That Hugh's and Yvonne's path does not follow that taken by the telegraph poles also comments upon the fact that their's and the Consul's paths also often run separately; furthermore, the event foreshadows the moment in the Tomalin forest when, unlike Geoffrey, they take the indirect route to Parian. ) In the following chapter the Consul, in his 'jungle-like' garden, recalls 'his friend Wilson when he so magnificently abandoned the University Expedition to disappear ... into the jungles of darkest Oceania never to return'

(130): at the end of Under the Volcano the Consul too will disappear into the depths of real jungle also never to return, Wilson's 'Oceania' paralleling Firmin's manic quest for the antediluvian world of Atlantis, and thus implicitly connecting the antediluvian forest at Leasowe, with its 'old stubby deserted lighthouse'(23), with the actual forest of Parian with its Farolito (little lighthouse).<sup>20</sup>

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Lowry would appear to ascribe special reverence to the symbol of the wood or forest in Under the Volcano. The place Quahnahuac is said to mean 'near the wood'(49) and it surely, in the course of the action, gives its name credit in that respect. The action of Lowry's novel does not all take place in Quahnahuac for the last chapter happens in Parian; in that Lowry based Parian to a great extent on Oaxaca the woods are, however, not etymologically forgotten (as indeed they are not literally forgotten either, in that Parian is surrounded by jungle) for Oaxaca means 'place of trees'.

Throughout Under the Volcano the dense forest is made to appear as a totally feasible natural phenomenon, totally characteristic of the terrain of central Mexico, which it must be remembered, and as Lowry informs us on the first page of his novel, is tropical; and, as with the volcanoes and the ravine, it becomes closely related to the people who inhabit it, yet again influencing and reflecting their states of mind. Lowry consistently enlarges or expands upon any single potential symbolical meaning for the wood or forest by having different types of them in Under the Volcano.

for example, the rural wood through which Hugh and Yvonne ride in Chapter Four is vastly different to the dense enmeshing jungle which they encounter in Chapter Eleven; similarly, the Mexican deciduous forests are made to contrast sharply with the coniferous landscape which surrounds the northern dreamland. As is common with many of Lowry's central symbols the implied layers and ambiguities which they appear to be capable of resonating become enhanced through a plethora of mythical or literary cross-reference. With his mention of the 'Hotel Casino de la Selva'(9) on the novel's first page proper, it more or less immediately becomes apparent that Lowry's jungle has a literary forbear in the wood which provides the setting for the opening of Dante's Divine Comedy.<sup>21</sup> The quotations from Dante scattered throughout the novel, especially Hugh's recitation of the opening line of the Comedy at the opening of Chapter Six, and the Consul's continuation of the line in the cantina El Bosque - 'Mi ritrovai in una bosca oscura - or selva'(228),<sup>22</sup> strengthen Lowry's ploy of wishing any wood to which he alludes to be readily identified with Dante's. The Divine Comedy begins as follows:

Midway this way of life we're bound upon,  
I woke to find myself in a dark wood,  
Where the right road was wholly lost and gone.

Ay me! how hard to speak of it - that rude  
And rough and stubborn forest! the mere breath  
Of memory stirs the old fear in the blood;

It is so bitter, it goes nigh to death;  
Yet there I gained such good, that, to convey  
The tale, I'll write what else I found therewith

How I got into it I cannot say ... 23

The lines are of strategic importance to many of the events described in Under the Volcano, for example, in Chapter Eleven Hugh and Yvonne also find themselves in a dark wood 'the right road ... wholly lost and gone', whilst both the Consul and Yvonne find their respective jungles leading 'nigh to death', etc.

Like Dante, Lowry also uses the forest as both a landscape of fact and a state of mind. When the Consul leaves behind the relative safety of the Salon Ofelia and rushes out into the adjacent jungle, which is growing darker and darker with every passing second, he too could be said to have left the 'straight' path and thus, we might like to think, that this marks the onset of his spiritual descent; indeed at Parian a very 'real' hell of sorts does soon become actualised. However, the Consul's Dante-esque flirtation with a dark wood cannot, it would seem, be accurately pin-pointed to the time at which he leaves behind the Salon: at the end of Chapter Seven he passes through the cantina El Bosque, meaning 'wood' - see Cantinas - before the opening word of the succeeding chapter evinces him travelling 'Downhill ...'(234), which could imply that this Dante-esque journey to the lower regions in effect begins then; similarly, at the very close of the novel, Firmin, as he dies, has the sensation of 'falling, into a forest'(376) and then is, immediately afterwards, cast into the ravine, which could imply that the moment of death represents the dark wood, whilst, in Geoffrey's case, the actual abyss itself is made to become synonymous with Dante's Inferno. Nor indeed is it only the Consul himself whom it would seem, within the present Dante-esque context, is described as paying a visit, via the dark wood, to the lower



regions. Hugh and Yvonne too, leaving the Salon Ofelia behind them, find themselves confronted by the dark forest; moreover, they even make a much more literal deviation from the straight path by taking the indirect and winding route to Parian.

It is interesting that in Chapter One, on only the ~~third~~ page of his novel, Lowry makes Jacques Laruelle make out 'the village of Tomalin, nestling behind the jungle, from which rose a thin blue scarf of illegal smoke, someone burning wood for carbon'(11). Tomalin, virtually completely obscured from view by jungle is where, later in the narrative, the trio of the Consul, Yvonne and Hugh will venture, and from there on through the jungle itself towards Parian. As such, although the wood or forest already encroaches itself on Quahnahuac, the terrain will be seen to become even more thickly wooded as the novel progresses: on the bus to the arena the characters ride through 'flat wooded country'(240); leaving the Salon Ofelia for Parian Hugh and Yvonne have the sensation that the 'jungle closed over them'(317). As the woods gradually grow thicker and denser, in effect becoming forests and jungles, they also become more overtly fiendish and appear to ensnare the victims into apparent engulfing traps secretly behind each individual tree. At the Salon Ofelia, during his day-dream, the Consul recalls, or conceives of, 'a tree like a green exploding sea-mine'(283), and in the remainder of the novel each tree too becomes like a potential mine; the forest itself a dangerous 'minefield'.

Once the victim (in the final two chapters of his novel Lowry makes Yvonne and the Consul become victims) has ventured into the dense enmeshing jungle there is no way back, for all signs on the trees point to either 'la Cascada'(318) - the 'falls', or 'a Parian' -

'hell'; none shows the way back to Tomalin. Admittedly, the path pursued by Hugh and Yvonne in Chapter Eleven (and implicitly also by the Consul minutes before them) splits into two but both 'alternatives' prove, in the context of Lowry's last two chapters, equally hazardous; indeed lethal. Earlier I suggested some of the anthropological connections between the tree and the cross; such connections are re-awakened within Lowry's 'forest of symbols',<sup>24</sup> to quote the author himself quoting Baudelaire, when the path through the jungle splits, stretching out 'on either side like the arms ... of a man being crucified'(319). Although the Consul himself will, within the general framework of Lowry's prolonged identification of him with Christ throughout the narrative, become the one who suffers a crucifixion of sorts in the dark confines of the Farolito, Yvonne's death too is also made to bear some analogies with the manner of the Messiah's passion. When she and Hugh are in ~~ear~~shot of Parian the path they have followed is described as 'divided ... from that very same path [they] had decided against, which the Consul must have taken'(334), the two routes now virtually, though not quite, re-aligning themselves serving to recall the earlier simile of them splitting like a man being crucified. Moreover, Yvonne dies because, initially at least, she loses her footing on a 'dark slippery log'(334), which again suggests the tree/cross parallel; in the way in which the log forms a rung of a ladder Lowry perhaps casts a sly reference towards a resurrection of sorts, especially also as Yvonne is soon to feel herself being lifted heavenwards. Markson notes added levels of meaning in this scene when he says that the path is also Dante's, as also observed supra, but equally 'what is "sort of tricky" [he quotes Yvonne's words of warning to Hugh] is that Cabbalistic symbolism in which the Tree of Life is represented by

a ladder ... And thus Yvonne's "balance" and her "note of triumph" both have to do with occult elements'.<sup>25</sup> Just as Yvonne drinks mescal in the last moments of her life (like the Consul), so she too is made, ~~was~~ although perhaps subconsciously, ~~to~~ assume a sort of Cabbalistic 'stance' (like the Consul) on the Tree of Life; furthermore, as is the case with Firmin himself, the situation of her death recalls the Christian archetype.

The dark Mexican forest, with its obvious Dante-esque correlative, is compared, throughout Under the Volcano, with the protective coniferous forests which become key constituent elements of the protagonists' visions of a northern dreamland. During their ride together Hugh imagines an idyllic bower of sorts within the bosom of nature:

I can see your shack now. It's between the forest and the sea... You'll have to go through the woods to the shore ... The woods will be wet. And occasionally a tree will come crashing down. And sometimes there will be a fog and that fog will freeze. Then your whole forest will become a crystal forest ... (126)

The short breathless sentences used by Lowry to render this speech may well suggest that the 'picture' Hugh evokes here is deliberately childlike, fantastical and unreal. Nevertheless, as the day progresses, Yvonne seems to become increasingly obsessed with the possibilities of her little home in the woods:

But it was not a shack - it was a home! It stood, on wide-girthed strong legs of pine, between the forest of pine and high, high waving alders and tall slim birches, and the sea. There was the narrow path that wound down through the forest from the store... (271)

This path, the 'forest path to the spring' symbolises the way through a forest and thereby deliberately mocks or contradicts the twin death paths through the Mexican jungle. Unfortunately however, although Lowry actualises the peaceful and idyllic northern dreamland path through the forest in his later work, the novella 'The Forest Path to the Spring', in the immediate context of Under the Volcano Yvonne is unable to allow her dream to materialise. In fact, as she dies, Yvonne envisages her idyllic little home near the forest 'on fire'(336). She perceives of the house and the surrounding woodland becoming conjoined in a massive conflagration. When she thinks of the 'woodshed on whose roof the white dogwood blossoms ... would fall no more, for the tree was burning'(336), Lowry must again be seen as relating the now burning tree to the Consul who is, of course, at precisely the same time that Yvonne has her thoughts, being fired upon by the police chiefs.<sup>26</sup>

At a couple of points in Under the Volcano Lowry alludes to forest fires: on the road to Tomalin, where they stop by the dying Indian, Hugh is told to discard his cigarette and the Consul thinks, 'Forest fires'(245); earlier in the day, the Consul and Yvonne had seen the photograph of the 'great rock split by forest fires' (59); both the Indian's and the Consul's deaths are unnecessary, and Lowry may wish to posit the 'waste' involved as being on a par with a gigantic conflagration; however, in that the split rock represents the rift in the Consul's and Yvonne's relationship, Lowry may suggest that they achieve a reunion in death and thus that the forest fires, which they both imagine as they die, now serve, metaphorically at least, to weld the split rock back together again.

Lowry's use of trees, woods, forests and jungle in Under the Volcano is never mono-dimensional. These features of his landscape have a multiplicity of different roles to play, yet ultimately the features do provide a system of order in their own right for they thrive on an interdependence, the effects of which are accumulative and self-conglomerating, so that eventually a complex structure or framework emerges. Not only are we unable to differentiate the wood from the trees, for, finally, both are subsumed in Lowry's vast 'forest of symbols'.<sup>27</sup>

TREES, WOODS, FOREST, JUNGLE - NOTES

1. - Roger Cook, The Tree of Life: Image for the Cosmos (New York and London, 1974), p.8.
2. - With his references to 'an antediluvian forest with ugly black stumps showing'(23); people 'burning wood for carbon'(11); 'little carbon shanties'(63); 'coal dust'(284), etc., Lowry gradually accumulates the tree's inherent connections with a 'black' underground sphere, which, in the context of the author's metaphysical cosmology, becomes overtly associated with hell. The fact that wood is burned for carbon and that coal is also a fuel assists in accentuating infernal properties.
3. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters (London, 1967)p.65.
4. - *ibid.*, p.71.
5. - In his letter to Cape, Lowry further elaborates upon the Tree of Life's cabbalistic implications in terms of the Consul when he writes that Firmin's 'spiritual domain ... is probably ... the world of spells and demons, represented by the Tree of Life upside down'(ibid.,p.65). Appropriately, various 'upside-down' trees appear in the text itself: in his garden the Consul notices 'inverted reflections of banana trees'(147) on the surface of his swimming pool; hurrying through the jungle to Parian, in Chapter Eleven, Hugh and Yvonne pass 'uprooted trees and smashed bushes'(319).
6. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.67.
7. - *ibid.*, p.67.
8. - Roger Cook, The Tree of Life, p.7.
9. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.67.
10. - A pillar, for example, is made to become central, if only metaphorically, to Under the Volcano when, in the centre of the fairground, in the centre of the day, and in the centre of the novel, Geoffrey and Jacques come across a roundabout with 'pictures on the panels running entirely around the inner wheel that was set horizontally and attached to the top of the central revolving pillar'(217). In a sense, the twelve chapters of Lowry's cyclically-designed fiction (see Wheels) could be said to be represented here as the pictures on the panels forever revolving around (and upon) a central axis.
11. - Roger Cook, The Tree of Life, p.9.
12. - See Tom Broganahan and June Kretchman, Mexico and Guatemala (New York, 1979), pp.329-30.

13. - Roger Cook, The Tree of Life, p.36.
14. - ibid., p.20.
15. - By Mrs. C.F. Alexander. See Hymns: Ancient and Modern (1972), p.163.
16. - Roger Cook, The Tree of Life, p.20.
17. - William H. New, Malcolm Lowry (Toronto, 1971), p.56.
18. - On the way to Tomalin Hugh thinks: 'Christ, why can't we be simple, Christ Jesus why may we not be simple, why may we not all be brothers?' and these sentiments are followed by a single-sentenced paragraph which runs as follows:  
     'Buses with odd names on them, a procession out of a side-road, were bobbing past in the opposite direction: buses to Tetecala, to Jujuta, to Xuitepec: buses to Xochitepec, to Xoxitepec' [my italics] (242-43).
19. - The reference further develops and ornaments the Edenic undercurrents operating throughout the Chapter. The Consul greets the cat by saying: 'hullo-my-little-snake-in-the-grass'(138), whilst Xicotancatl is the name of the famous garden in the Quahnahuac region which is advertised, like much else, on signs and bill-boards everywhere. That the Jardin Xicotancatl, like the Consul's garden is, at least to some extent, wrecked becomes demonstrated at Tomalin when what 'at first appears' to be a lake turns out to be only 'a broken greenhouse roof belonging to El Jardin Xicotancatl: only weeds lived in the greenhouse'(281).
20. - In that Wilson becomes a sort of prefiguratory 'doppelgänger' for Firmin, in regards to some of Geoffrey's later actions, perhaps Lowry is alluding to Poe's 'doppelgänger' story, 'William Wilson'
21. - William H. New cleverly juxtaposes the 'selva' with the 'self' when he notes that a dominant preoccupation of Lowry's is the 'chaos of self, selva, and Wilderness'. See Malcolm Lowry, p.48.
22. - The mistake in the Consul's mind arises because he confuses the Italian word for wood, and the word Dante uses, 'bosca', with the Spanish, 'selva'.
23. - Dante, The Divine Comedy: Hell, Canto I, ll.1-10, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers (Harmondsworth, 1972), p.71.
24. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.78.
25. - David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano: Myth, Symbol, Meaning (New York, 1978), p.177.

26. - The dogwood blossoms falling evoked here perhaps also have a minor thematic purpose in terms of Geoffrey's fate, in that he imagines falling into a wood; he then is made to fall down the ravine; and, finally, a dog falls down the abyss after him.
27. - See Note 24.



ANIMALS

With full gaze the animal sees the open.  
 Only our eyes, as if reversed, are like snares  
 set around it, block the freedom of its going.  
 Only from the face of the beast do we know  
 what is outside; for even little children  
 we turn around and force them to look backward  
 at the world of forms, and they do not see the open  
 so deep in the animal's eyes. Free from death.  
 Only we see that; but the beast is free  
 and has its death always behind it and God before it,  
 and when it walks it goes toward eternity,  
 as springs flow.

Rilke, 'Eighth Elegy', Duino Elegies

When speaking to Yvonne about his book on Atlantis, the  
 Consul tells her that he 'might even work in something about  
 Coxcox and Noah'(91). Firmin's brief allusion to Noah proves

highly appropriate in the larger context of Under the Volcano in general in that, as the novel progresses, an endless stream of different animals pass before our eyes as if filing steadily into the ark. (Further Noah-like manipulation is also suggested by means of a strange simile in Chapter Five: 'A procession of thought like little elderly animals filed through the Consul's mind' (145).) An encyclopedia of various sorts, Under the Volcano is also a bestiary, innumerable different animals being introduced, commented upon and employed symbolically or allegorically. Markson enumerates a 'few', although, as he is quick to concede, by no means all beasts mentioned in the novel for us:

Tigers, anteaters, whip-poor-wills, condors, deer, fish, wolves, coppery-tailed trogons, lions, bulls, sharks, swallows, seagulls, kingfishers, herons, seals, vultures, eagles, frogs, turtles, swans, elephants, pigeons, parrots, gila monsters, boa constrictors, goats, turkeys, rabbits, cocks, cats...<sup>1</sup>

Lowry's novel is a teeming menagerie, a zoological showcase of all types of animals; indeed even mythical beasts like Cerberus, Anubis (Cerberus' double in Egyptian myth), Pegasus, the Minotaur, etc. are assimilated into the all-inclusive scheme. 'They always had zoos in Mexico apparently', the Consul informs Hugh, Moctezuma, courteous fellow, even showed stout Cortés around a zoo. The poor chap thought he was in infernal regions' (191). Mexico's perennial relationship with zoos becomes exploited by Lowry when he makes his entire local terrain into a kind of all-embracing zoological 'garden'; moreover, Under the Volcano, as *Inferno* of a Modern Divine Comedy, also benefits from Cortez's apparent claim that the profusion of beasts he saw grouped together made him think he was in hell.

I don't hope to analyse each reference to every animal mentioned in the novel; many are after all merely present to enhance the 'local colour heaped on in shovelfuls ...[which] gives one an astonishing sense of the place and the atmosphere'.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed innumerable animals in the novel do often tend to simply appear on the scene in order to enhance the 'overloaded and embellished'(301) nature of the book in general; in order to add layers of decoration, in an almost medieval manner, much as if they were carved on wood, to the whole 'churrigueresque structure',<sup>3</sup> of the work, which Lowry, of course, conceived of in the ornate manner of 'some Mexican ... cathedral'.<sup>4</sup> Whilst discussing his Gothic cathedral parallel in his letter to Cape, Lowry goes on to say that this notion or concept of form 'is probably just confusing, the more especially since I have been quoting Aristotle at you, and the book has in its odd way a severe classical pattern'.<sup>5</sup>

In a way many of the key animals employed by Lowry in the Volcano, in terms of providing the novel with yet another 'system of order', do tend to conform to what might be termed a 'classical' pattern; that is the majority appear again and again to underline certain archetypal situations. Moreover, most of the major animals used tend to be rather rigidly aligned to either friendly and beneficent, or hostile and evil values, or both (this inherent and natural ambiguity which some of the beasts possess also reflects interestingly on the persona of the Consul who is himself remorselessly compared to, and symbolised by, most of the different creatures). Lowry also tends to employ the connotations of his animals 'classically' or traditionally, so that, in Friedman's words, beasts like the 'dove, swallow, nightingale, swan, eagle and lark' are 'paradisaal images' whilst the 'bat and vulture', together with the 'snake, goat and

wolf', are 'infernal'.<sup>6</sup> Friedman goes on to term the 'horse [a symbol of a] mysteriously creative yet potentially destructive vitality',<sup>7</sup> and this dualistic role, that is as neither (in Friedman's terms) paradisaical nor infernal, is one which it readily assumes in the context of Lowry's novel too. Most of the animals also tend to function only in a way which is dependent on the emotional reaction of a character. To the protagonists most beasts are neither purely demonic nor purely friendly, for they become involved with them in different ways and in different circumstances. Only as readers can we build up an objective picture of the functions of each creature. Among the mammals that animate the Lowryian world, the greatest responsibility lies with the dog and the horse which both exert a wide range of influences throughout the text (from the mythic to the specific), and which also, of course, greatly influence and affect the main characters, and therefore, the very nature and course of the action itself.

In Bustamente's cinema Laruelle observes 'Dark shapes of pariah dogs prowl[ing] in and out of the stalls'(32). The presence of the dogs in the cinema described in Under the Volcano's first chapter is, like much else, essentially introductory, for the dog will pursue the main protagonists (mainly the Consul) remorselessly throughout the Day of the Dead. Wherever his steps take Firmin Lowry makes a dog follow him: in Oaxaca, where he had sought refuge after Yvonne's departure, he attempts to avoid being pestered by the howling pariah dogs; in Quahnahuac the dog is made to both enter his own ruined garden with him as well as protect or guard the entrance to cantinas; in Tomalin, where the bull-fight takes place, the dogs snap at the heels of the tormented bull, the

latter itself a symbol for the Consul (see below); and finally, in Parian, the dog accompanies Geoffrey, firstly into the Farolito itself, and secondly, into the abyss and the realm of death.

The close, mutual and symbiotic relationship which exists between the dog and the Consul is suggested by Lowry in a variety of subtle and ingenious ways. Firmin himself has been leading what might be termed 'a dog's life' for years; in Quahnahuac especially he appears to pursue a roaming pariah-like existence very much like that of his shadowing familiar. With the recall of her Consuls from Mexico Britain has severed links with Firmin; likewise Geoffrey is also rendered a virtual outsider within the Mexican community in which he lives, the Mexicans in the main shirking or (eventually) acting in a deliberately hostile way towards him. That Firmin and the dog both share an exile-like existence may therefore partially explain why there frequently appears a certain air of familiarity between them. Another reason why the dog may be a friend of the Consul is that he has deliberately selected it as a demonic 'familiar'. B.W.Martin defines a familiar in terms of a designation of 'one or more small creatures (e.g. a dog, cat, hedgehog, mouse, toad) made by a witch. Such creatures were considered by those prosecuting witches to be the repository of diabolic spirits or powers which advised and acted for the witch and in return were nourished'.<sup>8</sup> The Consul may indeed have made the acquaintance of the dog during one of his mescal or tequila-induced flights to the lower regions (in his letter to Yvonne, the Consul speaks, after his evocation of the 'nightly grapple with death', of 'howling pariah dogs'(41)). Many critics

have also sought to point out the literary kinship which exists between Lowry's dog and the satanic poodle which pursues Goethe's Faust.<sup>9</sup> (Towards the close of his narrative Lowry still toys with his alternative Faustus and Faust archetypes, just as he had done in Chapter One: the Consul conceives of his own 'downward flight' (362), which serves to remind us of the 'hellish fall' (40) quoted from Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, yet by also thinking he is being pressed to his seat 'as if a black dog had settled on his back' (362) Lowry now alludes particularly to the Goethean archetype, as he had done in Chapter One also with his mock stage direction: Enter Wagner, solus (40).) By openly employing the Goethean literary affinity and allowing the pariah dog to enter the Consul's garden, Lowry yet again reinforces the hellish state which the garden's own decrepitude had already partly defined; as such it comes as no real surprise when the Consul directly addresses the dog by name, "Perro!" the Consul, removing his glasses, said amiably to the pariah dog that had appeared familiarly [my italics] at heel' (70). (The Consul may remove his dark glasses here because Lowry wishes to imply that his own hellish garden is in itself sufficiently 'dark' for him to have no reason to wear them.) Later the Consul finds himself gazing straight into the eyes of a dog:

It was a pariah dog and disturbingly familiar. 'Perro', he repeated, as it still stood there - but had not this incident occurred, was it not now, as it were, occurring an hour or two ago, he thought in a flash. Strange. (131)

The demonic dog (whether or not it is continuously the same dog is irrelevant) therefore soon takes on the role of yet another 'leitmotif' throughout the narrative. At the close of Chapter Two

The Consul too had said 'Strange', whilst the next and final sentence of the chapter charts that 'A hideous pariah dog followed them in'(69). The Consul, or rather Lowry, having meticulously established a close relationship between the dog and hell, therefore has no need to complete the sentence with the word when Firmin is rendered as having:

declaimed to the dog:  
'Yet this day, pichicho, shalt thou be  
with me in - '(232).

Fundamentally, it is the Consul alone who imposes upon the dog evil or sinister connotations of 'hell' and 'death', etc. yet Hugh and Yvonne, perhaps unconsciously, also frequently appear to 'sense' these attributes of the pariah. Anyway Lowry often allows their reactions to the animal to 'foreshadow' the final outcome when the bodies of both Firmin and the dog are hurtled down the ravine (similar fateful foreshadowing also takes place with the horse - see below). Crossing a ravine on the bus, Hugh sees 'a dead dog right at the bottom, nuzzling the refuse; white bones showed through the carcass'(236); later, reconsidering the Mexican revolution, he thinks of the pariah dogs barbecued in the market place'(251); in the following chapter (Nine) Yvonne 'remembered the dog that was dying on the street in Honolulu, rivulets of blood streaked the deserted pavement'(258). Strategically, these visionary episodes or glimpses surround the incident of the Indian left dying by the wayside who too has been treated as if he were an animal; and thus, when the dying Consul thinks, 'Now he was the one dying by the wayside where no good Samaritan would halt'(375), he

makes yet another implied connection between himself, the Indian and the dog.

The condition of the Consul, the Indian and the dog, in terms of the degree of suffering to which they are subjected, is already announced by Lowry in the second of the three epigraphs to his novel, that taken from Bunyan's Grace Abounding for the Chief of Sinners:

Now I blessed the condition of the dog and toad,  
yea, gladly would I have been in the condition  
of the dog or horse, for I knew they had no soul  
to perish under the everlasting weight of Hell  
or Sin, as mine was like to do. (7)

There is I believe some degree of irony in these lines in terms of the ensuing narrative. Both dog and horse in Under the Volcano are provided with 'souls' of sorts; both become acute symbolic correlatives, 'anima' one might say, for the condition of the protagonists; and both are also made to perish under an everlasting weight of Hell or Sin.

In Chapter Three, Geoffrey makes a verbal connection with the sound of drums, the word pariah and the place Parian: 'the Consul imagined he still heard the music of the ball, which must have long since ceased, so that this silence was pervaded as with a stale thudding of drums. Pariah: that meant drums too. Parian' (80). It is at the Farolito at Parian, as the Consul's fate approaches, accompanied, as it were, by a metaphorical drum roll, that the pariah dog also makes its most pertinent and final series of appearances. Firstly, the Consul conceives of the 'dreadful night



inevitably awaiting him ... interrupted by voices which were really dogs barking'(343): the bark of the dog again takes on the role of a 'familiar' voice and must needs be associated with the innumerable other voices (both real and imaginary) Firmin has heard throughout his final day. (The whole scene of dreadful night which the Consul conjures up here directly resembles the opening paragraph of his unsent letter also written at the Farolito: not only are the dogs present on both occasions but also the 'daemonic orchestras', 'imaginary parties arriving', and 'the dark's spinnets' (343, 41).) Secondly, the Consul imagines himself being hemmed in, unable to escape; the metaphorical black dog having settled on his back pressing him to his seat. When Firmin tells the police chiefs that his name is 'Blackstone' (370) he all but seals his fate and there is perhaps a connection to be made with the 'black dog'(362) and the name Blackstone simply in terms of the escape route which the black dog metaphorically denies him being in actuality supplied, as it were, by his own insistence on his hero's name. Thirdly, just before Geoffrey is shot, Lowry renders 'Two pariah dogs [running] around in the bar'(371): in a sense Firmin now 'becomes' one of the dogs whilst the other is, or remains, the familiar dog of his pilgrimage; at this late and precarious stage the Consul is cruelly made to behave like a trapped dog running around in circles (the wheel symbol's entrapping associations) unable to free himself. Fourthly, of course, in the final sentence of the novel, 'a dead dog [is tossed] after him down the ravine' (376).

Essentially throughout Under the Volcano, and especially in Chapter Twelve, the dog's role is one defined by total

negativity, enhanced by repetitive associations of blackness, hell and death, and such a role is archetypally or mythically reinforced by the literary parallels of Goethe's 'poodle' and also by the prototype of Cerberus which, in a specifically Dante-esque context, gnaws at the gluttonous in the Inferno. Nevertheless, the dog which accompanies the Consul at the point of death is perhaps meant to counterbalance the animal's earlier consistently negative associations. Markson informs us that 'a dog follows Orion to heaven. A climactic passage in the Mahabharata concerns the same sort of event. And in one version of his death Quetzalcoatl is reborn as a dog.'<sup>10</sup> These transcendental or paradisaical aspects of the dog's potential mythic connotations, in the main only become tentatively explored by Lowry when he allows the animal to accompany the Consul into the realm of death itself. However, a benign dog of sorts, although of a very different type, is introduced into the mainstream narrative during Yvonne's and Hugh's countryside ride depicted in Chapter Four. The 'affectionate scrubbed woolly white dog belong[ing] to the farm'(109), which ambles alongside them, bears no resemblance to the pariahs following the Consul everywhere; it is both actually and thus, in Lowry's colour world, metaphorically, depicted as white, Lowry stating, in effect, that it has lost the black aspect attributed to the pariah; moreover, as 'woolly' it also takes on the symbolic meekness of a sheep as opposed to the ferocity of a hound. (Later in the cantina El Bosque the Consul asks himself: 'how many wolves do we feel on our heels, while our real enemies go in sheepskin by?' (232), implying perhaps that his own familiar demonic dog does not really represent a wolf to him, whilst the soft 'woolly' life of non-alcoholic salvation is in fact Firmin's real foe.)

The apocalyptic horse of death is seen in many different moods and settings throughout the thirteen hours of the novel's time span. Although the motorised vehicle had undoubtedly made its sporadic appearance in Mexico in 1938, the horse still remained the most available, and also, in view of the terrain, probably the best means of transport in the country. Lowry appears fascinated by the dual aspects of the horse: either man can 'tame the horse of shaggy mane'(7), as in the extract from Sophocles, so that it obeys his orders, or the horse can rebel, denying its subordinate role and unleashing its own demonic and frenzied power. Both aspects of the horse become depicted in various ways throughout Under the Volcano. During her ride into the Mexican landscape in Chapter Four, Yvonne experiences a relationship of friendship and mutual understanding with the animal; some eight hours later a wild and rebellious horse tramples her to death.

Both Hugh and Yvonne are rendered in various ways as possessing a close kinship and affinity with the beast. In her teens Yvonne embarked on a film career as the leading lady in Western films. She is described both as a 'rough-riding serial queen', as well as 'an expert horsewoman'(263), having 'ridden horses down ravines' and proved her expertise of the 'flying mount' and the 'double pick-off'(264) - ironically her's and the Consul's deaths will also, by ~~virtue~~ of a horse, become a kind of double pick-off! Hugh's horsemanship is made to derive partially from the time he spent in Spain with his friend Juan Cerillo and partially from his more recent experiences on a Texan cattle ranch. Even the Consul himself, who really only comes into contact with a horse once during his final day (although with devastating effect) is,

during his student days, reputed to have ridden 'into college on a horse'(179). (Hugh says that the horse was 'tied up in the buttery'(179) and on the following page conceives of Cambridge itself as 'the strange dream of some old monk ... whose forbidding house ... had once shone like a beacon out of the mysterious silence'(180): in the Farolito, ex-monastery and 'lighthouse' that invites the storm, the Consul, for probably only the second, and certainly for the last time in his life, will again confront a tied-up horse.) However, the horse remains a friend or ally of man only when man exerts his supremacy over the beast; if he loosens his grip the horse returns to its primal state of liberty and openly turns against man.

On his walk through Quahnahuac Laruelle encounters an intoxicated rider who appears in the very process of loosening (and losing) his grip over a horse:

The rider of the horse was so drunk he was sprawling all over his mount, his stirrups lost, a feat in itself considering their size, and barely managing to hold on by the reins, though not once did he grasp the pommel to steady himself. The horse reared wildly, rebellious - half fearful, half contemptuous, perhaps, of its rider - and then it catapulted in the direction of the car: the man, who seemed to be falling straight backwards at first, miraculously saved himself only to slip to one side like a trick rider, regained the saddle, slid, slipped, fell backwards - just saving himself each time ... (28)

Laruelle openly compares the scene before him with the Consul himself, so that it forms virtually an elegy to his dead friend's

memory: 'this too he thought suddenly, this maniacal vision of senseless frenzy, but controlled, not quite uncontrolled, somehow almost admirable, this too, obscurely, was the Consul ...'(28). Throughout Under the Volcano, although Hugh and Yvonne are often to be found riding or are described as having ridden horses, it is the Consul who becomes the one symbolically most closely identified with both horses and their riders. It is the Consul who is twice described as being 'strong as a horse'(76, 126) and it is also he who after drunkenly declaring to the police chiefs that he is a writer is told in their broken English that he is a 'wridar'(371). Indeed, the maniacal aspects of the many untamed horses in the novel (specifically the horse with the number seven branded to it) become overtly transcribable onto many aspects of the Consul's own character; and thus when the horse eventually kills Yvonne it is as if Firmin himself has 'literally' performed the deed (as he in effect has by unleashing the animal) by refusing to be 'harnessed', pursuing his own roaming path and unwittingly (subconsciously perhaps?) releasing his own latent equine energy.

At the end of Chapter Eleven the horse indeed appears as a symbol of uncontrolled and aimless power. Pure coincidence alone appears to direct it towards Yvonne.<sup>11</sup> However, the incident of Yvonne's death is not, in the context of the preceding narrative, totally 'a shot out of the blue', as it were, for it is frequently foreshadowed throughout the preceding eleven chapters. Whilst she was an actress in Hollywood Yvonne once found herself 'caught in a ravine with two hundred stampeding horses'(262). Slightly later she recalls entering a cinema and seeing 'a shadowy

horse, gigantic, filling the whole screen, [which] seemed [to be] leaping out of it at her' (286). Indeed, frequently, the horses in Under the Volcano appear to be present in order to readily anticipate or predetermine one aspect of the novel's denouement; the animal's mere presence on any respective scene already, in terms of its delineation throughout the text, being implicitly fatalistic. (The aura of fate which accompanies the Indian's horse is also greatly enhanced by the mystical number seven branded to its rump - see Numbers.) Lowry often achieves this foreshadowing or pre-emptive ordering of his material in a variety of very subtle ways. For example, in Chapter One, Laruelle, recalling the scene at Leasowe, remembers 'the estuary, seven miles wide of a river: white horses westward marked where the real sea began' (23): the breakers (white horses) and the fact that the estuary is seven miles wide, already obliquely hinting at what is to come. In Chapter Four, when Yvonne and Hugh take their morning ride, Lowry provides the following piece of description:

They were galloping parallel to the road which was hedgeless and on ground level, then the thudding regular thunder of the hooves struck abruptly hard and metallic and dispersed and they were clattering on the road itself; it bore away to the right skirting the woods round a sort of headland jutting into the plain. (127-28)

The 'thunder' of the hooves is to be given a 'galloping parallel' in the actual thunderstorm during which the finale takes place; that the hooves strike 'abruptly hard and metallic', in a sense, both prefigures the shots which kill the Consul as well as the force with which Yvonne is trampled; whilst Yvonne is in control of her horse, as here, the path bears to the right merely 'skirting'

the woods yet later when the horse is in control of the situation, as it were, Yvonne will take the path to the left and instead of skirting the woods find herself in their centre. In Chapter Eight Hugh muses on not being able to help the dying Indian and thinks: 'He had been on the look-out immediately for possible clues to diagnosis such as broken ladders, stains of blood, moving machinery, and restive horses'(252). These clues, of course, also help us in our diagnosis of the outcome where broken ladders, restive horses and ensuing stains of blood again come directly into play. In fact, as an integral and key element in the entire system of predetermination which forms so much of the process (and progress) of Lowry's narrative, the horse becomes a vital cog in the whole 'moving machinery' which is the novel. In his letter to Cane Lowry describes his book as 'a kind of opera - or even a horse opera' and a few lines later says: 'It can even be regarded as a sort of machine'.<sup>12</sup>

The dog and the horse constantly reappear at various strategic stages and junctures throughout the narrative - leading the protagonists on, shadowing them, leading us as readers on to new vistas and situations, foreshadowing the end. These varying perspectives and functions which the two animals have are not adequately mirrored by any other beasts. Most other animals are viewed in a much more limited light and tend only to symbolise particular aspects or modes of behaviour which they have in common with either a single protagonist or a feature of the human condition in general.

Amongst such symbolical 'situations' the bull-fight at the Arena Tomalin assumes a central position. The bull makes an explosive entrance into the arena and begins

to cruise round the edge of the ring slowly, thoughtfully, though raising much dust. It was prepared to enjoy the game as much as anyone, at its own expense if need be, only its dignity must receive proper recognition first. (257)

Lowry makes the bull almost a human character requiring proper recognition of its dignity; however, soon it is compelled to realise that its enemies do not adhere to the rules of fair play and that the spectator's interest in its predicament can only really be adequately stimulated by the sight of blood. The Consul's own imminent predicament at the Farolito, of course mirrors the condition of the bull as he too becomes a 'poor old creature ... drawn, lured, into events of which he has no real comprehension' (259). Later on, during its prolonged torment, the bull is 'driven at a near gallop from the open pen by the cruel thrusts and pokes intended to arrest him ... and [falls] headlong into the dust' (274). At the Farolito too the Consul is driven out of the bar, half-hearted attempts are made to 'arrest' him, he is shot and also falls headlong, firstly, to the ground and then, secondly, into the ravine. Addressing the bull the Consul says:

I christen him Nandi, vehicle of Siva, from whose hair the river Ganges flows, and who has also been identified with the Vedic storm-god Vindra - known to the ancient Mexicans as Huracan. (259)

These words link the bull with both India (the Consul's birth-



place) and Mexico (where he is about to die). Moreover, by implicitly identifying the bull with Huracan, the Consul also recalls for us the line about the 'spirit of the abyss, the god of storm'(22) which he had once delivered to Laruelle: as bull of sorts himself the Consul too is imminently to come into close contact with the spirit of the abyss (furthermore, a dog is to follow him down the ravine just as in the arena a 'little dog [is to be found] snapping at [the] heels'(257) of the bull.)<sup>13</sup> When Hugh enters the ring to ride the bull, Lowry again remorselessly employs the animal as a symbolic correlative for Geoffrey. Hugh's mastery of the beast parallels his continual attempts at one-upmanship over his half-brother, a theme about to attain a climax in their socio-political argument in the Salon Ofelia. Hugh eventually rides the bull around a 'small fixed circle'(280), whilst the Consul feeling hemmed in, frustrated, and defeated in the Salon frees himself for a final time from the grip of his two companions and rushes out into the night. Lowry also does some subtle biblical manipulation when he describes the bull which Hugh is about to mount as 'raising Cain in the pen'(275): as rider of the bull Hugh (Cain) is, in a sense, also 'raised', and in such a context the bull, Geoffrey thus becomes implicitly related to Abel; and Lowry again underlines his omnipresent sub-theme that in a way Hugh eventually 'murders' his brother.

The bull greatly reflects on various aspects of Geoffrey's condition yet it is also employed to comment, in Yvonne's eyes, on life itself: 'Yes, it struck her now that this whole business of the bull was like a life; the important birth, the fair chance, the tentative, then assured, then half-despairing circulations of the

ring'(261). Yvonne's life, with its numerous ups and downs, beginnings and ends, starts and restarts, also parallels the aimless and futile circulations of the entrapped animal. In a way Yvonne's insight into the plight of the animal implicitly reveals that the visions of the northern paradise which she has in this chapter are really only an idealistic dream and the product of an illusion:

Yes, it struck her now that this whole business of the bull was like a life; the important birth, the fair chance, the tentative, then assured, then half-despairing circulations of the ring, an obstacle negotiated - a feat improperly recognized - boredom, resignation, collapse ... (261)

As I suggested elsewhere the goat is another animal which would, in many respects, appear to directly represent the Consul. It makes its central appearance in Chapter Four whilst Hugh and Yvonne have stolen away from Geoffrey leaving him asleep in his garden, yet his presence undoubtedly becomes 'reawakened' in the animal itself, for example, the beast regards Hugh and Yvonne 'with patriarchal contempt'(103), whilst Geoffrey too is frequently alluded to as Papa or father. Again there is foreshadowing of later events implicit in the scene: by charging the goat drives Hugh and Yvonne (literally) into each others arms, whilst the Consul's jealousy, especially in the Salon *Ofelia*, brings about a similar effect. Hugh, still discussing journalists with Yvonne from an earlier conversation when the animal charges, has cause to refer to the goat in the following convoluted context:

'Goats', he said, twisting Yvonne firmly out of his arms, 'Even when there are no wars think of the damage they do.' he went on ... 'I mean journalists, not goats. There's no punishment on earth fit for them. Only the Malebolge ... And here is the Malebolge.' (104)

The brief linguistic confusion has a double anticipatory effect: firstly, Geoffrey becomes a scapegoat of sorts for the Fascists due to the 'damage' done by his journalist brother in leaving a copy of his anti-Fascist news telegram in the pocket of the Consul's jacket; secondly, as either journalist (which he is not) or goat (which he is made to be) the Consul too, of course, is found to have no suitable punishment on earth fit for him, except the Malebolge!

The goat's head is both a symbol for the devil as well as the mask worn by the devil's disciples: Firmin, as both, in a way, 'mythically' the Devil and in actuality a potential devil's follower, therefore also benefits from his close association with the goat.<sup>14</sup> Lowry again links the Consul to the goat in yet another way though when he makes Firmin use the Spanish word cabrón to Laruelle during another little piece of inspired word play:

"But I am going," the Consul said, commencing to take one of the shrimps apart. "Not camarones," he added. 'Cabrones. That's what the Mexicans call them.' Placing his thumbs at the base of both ears he wagged his fingers. "Cabrón. You too, perhaps ..." (220)

'Cabrón' literally means both 'he-goat' and 'cuckold' (hence the Consul's finger-wiggling act) and Geoffrey obviously frequently thinks of himself, in almost classically paranoid fashion, as cuckolded by

both Hugh and Jacques, as indeed he has been. When he says 'you too, perhaps' to the Frenchman he is both offering him a shrimp<sup>15</sup> as well as possibly whimsically suggesting that Laruelle too is at that moment also being cuckolded by Hugh; and thus when the goat attacks Hugh and Yvonne it may also be said to represent the Consul as 'cuckold' seeking to employ the 'horns' with which he has been endowed in some sort of act of revenge.

The sinister goat, like the horse and the dog, although to a far lesser extent, also performs something of a leitmotifal function throughout the text by appearing and reappearing in various guises and in different contexts. For example, the Consul recalls having visited Vigil's consulting room in the Avenida de la Revolución:

for some drunken reason in the early hours of the morning, macabre with its pictures of ancient Spanish surgeons, their goat faces rising queerly from ruffs resembling ectoplasm, roaring with laughter as they performed inquisitorial operations ... (141) <sup>16</sup>

At the Farolito the Consul is to come up against the police chiefs also laughing as they perform their inquisitorial operations; moreover, within the implied context of a witches' sabbat, the horned gods (those wearing the goat mask) become identified with the 'prosecuting witches' or those performing the rites of initiation and torture.<sup>17</sup> In Chapter Six, Hugh recalls his old prep school headmaster, a certain 'Dr Gotelby', and a second or so later says, or thinks, 'Goat old boy' (175): if we remember Hugh's recollection about 'riding on horseback with the headmaster's wife' (114) then, in the context of the Day of the Dead, Geoffrey again becomes in

another sort of ~~way~~, via the Gotelby/Goat old boy word play, the goat itself. Not all goats in the novel are malicious. Just as a scrubbed woolly white dog counterbalances the black pariahs which pursue the Consul everywhere, so 'meek and sweet-looking goats jangling little bells'(193) appear in the narrative to contrast with the earlier encountered billy-goat. Nevertheless, immediately after Lowry describes these goats he includes the italicised line: 'Father is waiting for you though. Father has not forgotten'(193) which must again implicitly relate, in Hugh's eyes, as the chapter is seen from his point of view, to the Consul.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, the following sentence charts that 'Behind the goats a woman [staggers along] under the weight of a basket loaded with carbon'(193): perhaps Lowry intends some inspired, if oblique, word play on carbon and 'cabron'; the Consul too, metaphorically, now having to follow the goat under the weight of his cackoldry.

Discussing cats with Mr Quincey, the Consul apparently quotes his hero William Blackstone, calling them 'Animals not fit for food and kept only for pleasure, curiosity, or whim'(138). Indeed it appears that the cats kept by Lowry in Under the Volcano are also only present for pleasure, curiosity or whim. In a flight of his drunken imagination the Consul launches into the following famous passage of word play and free association:

Knock, knock, knock: Who's there? Cat. Cat who? Catastrophe. Catastrophe who? Catastrophysicist. What, is it you, my little popocat? Just wait an eternity till Jacques and I have finished murdering sleep? Katabasis to cat abysses. Cat hartes atratus ... (140)

The cat's verbal associations with catastrophe, katabasis and Popocatepetl, although somewhat strained, reinforce its basic function within the text in assisting to foreshadow the novel's denouement. Earlier in the day the Consul had informed Yvonne that their own two cats had died after the Consul had left them alone for a few days immediately after Yvonne's departure:

'The cats had died,' he said, 'when I got back - Pedro insisted it was typhoid. Or rather, poor Old Oedipuss died the very day you left apparently, he'd already been thrown down the barranca while little Pathos was lying in the garden under the plantains when I arrived looking even sicker than when we first picked her out of the gutter; dying, though no one could make out what of: Maria claimed it was a broken heart -' (93-4)

Oedipuss' and Pathos' deaths cry out to be directly compared with the Consul's and Yvonne's: one thrown into the barranca, the other dying in the nearby forest (plantains).<sup>19</sup> Moreover, when Firmin suggests that Oedipuss died on the very day that Yvonne left Lowry perhaps implies that Geoffrey's death process in essence began with her departure too. The cat therefore assumes a purely foreshadowing role symbolically representing the imminent conditions of the Consul and his ex-wife. (With Firmin as a sort of Oedipal figure<sup>20</sup> it is also appropriate that the cat shares the name of the Greek hero, whilst 'Pathos' may also relate to the pathetic attempts made by Yvonne for an adequate reconciliation with Geoffrey.)

When Firmin talks of a decisiveness that he had borrowed 'from the same source as the genius and his interest in cats'(139) we may wonder, for a moment, to precisely whom he is referring?

However, such an enigma is easily solved if we recall that in Chapter One it is Abraham Taskerson who is described as 'brooding in his study with the door open, drinking hour after hour, his cats on his lap'(24). The Consul himself, whose own cats have died, is unable to maintain the 'cosy' provincial life-style of his genius mentor; instead, Lowry posits the cats as in some way living 'inside' the Consul (this is jokingly reinforced when he asks Vigil what he would prescribe 'for a slight case of Katzenjammer?'(142)), and, appropriately, when he thinks of the Indians who also live somewhere inside him Firmin addresses his words to Quincey's cat: "Now, little cat", the Consul tapped his chest indicatively [my italics], and the cat, its face swelling, body arched, important, stepped back, "the Indians are in here"(139).

As Under the Volcano toys irreverently with the theme of the Fall, Lowry frequently attempts to uphold his parodic manipulation of the Biblical allegory in as many different aspects as possible. The role the snake plays in the novel, and the impact which it exerts on the protagonists, is therefore partly due to Lowry's endless interest in the possibilities of mythical manipulation, and partly, and on a very 'realistic' level, to the fact that snakes are indeed present and to be seen in tropical Mexico. Traditionally, the snake has been ascribed evil or devilish connotations; it has been regarded as a prime enemy of man luring him into corruption and ruin. In his hellish garden though, the Consul immediately terms the reptile an acquaintance, and thus also designates it as another possible familiar: 'Where was his friend the snake now?' (144) The Consul reacts to the animal as if he has been in league

with it/the Devil for a long time and is no longer frightened by its sudden appearance. (In one possible reading of the Genesis manipulations occurring in Chapter Five the Consul becomes the Eve persona by drinking from his hidden tequila bottle/eating of the Tree of Knowledge; and, as such, his collusions with the Serpent/Satan fit into this pattern quite well.) Hugh appears much more aware of the dangers in which the Consul unknowingly seems to be enmeshing himself; he compares the Consul's condition to that of a tiger being gradually choked by a rather larger snake than the one Firmin encounters in his garden:

It occurred to Hugh that the poor old chap might be, finally, helpless, in the grip of something against which all his remarkable defences could avail him little. What use were his talons and fangs to the dying tiger? In the clutches, say to make matters worse, of a boa-constrictor?(187)

In a sense, the corruption Hugh attributes to the snake reaches beyond the individual to attain universal dimensions. Within his own hellish garden the Consul appears metaphorically safe and the snake acts as a friend rather than an enemy; outside though, and as the day progresses, the snake gradually tightens its 'metaphorical' grip on the Consul, especially in the sense in which Geoffrey poisons himself increasingly with alcohol, until he becomes ultimately gobbled up by the gaping 'serpentine barranca' (127).

The temptation scene in the Consul's garden parallels the earlier episode where Hugh is oppressed by various feelings of guilt and remorse. One such guilt feeling may concern his



'adultery' with Yvonne: on their ride together they cross a 'dead garter snake, embossed on the path like a belt to a pair of bathing trunks'(115), the 'garter' element in the snake's name suggesting sexual infidelity.<sup>21</sup> Ingeniously, Lowry makes Hugh, firstly compare himself to Judas, and secondly, has him regard temptation as 'the cowardly, the future-corruptive serpent'(115). In such a way, as hinted elsewhere, the Consul's garden becomes both an Eden and a Gethsemane. Eventually Hugh transcends his individual condition and is able to establish an equation between his own potential corruption and the corrupt state of Mexico itself, seemingly seduced by the seductive serpent of the Fascist regime. In associating his condition with the situation of Mexico in general, Hugh half-heartedly recognises his previous mistakes or temptations and gathers enough courage to momentarily, at least, strike dead the serpent in his mind. Hugh has really only partially regained his moral integrity for he later loses it again; meanwhile, the Consul's instinct reveals that his half-brother is not entirely innocent of betrayal of some sort, and thus, more or less the first thing Geoffrey says to him is 'Hi there, Hugh, you old snake in the grass'(145).

Firmin does not really appear to exaggerate when he states that the whole insect world turns against him, for the novel swarms with insects of all sorts: scorpions, butterflies, ants, wasps, locusts, caterpillars, crickets, mosquitoes, flies, cockroaches, beetles, gnats, etc. The influence of alcohol on the Consul has the effect of sharpening his senses and, in a way, also highlighting his guilt complexes. Both of these effects conveniently become projected onto the insect world:

Now a scorpion was moving slowly across towards him. Suddenly the Consul rose, trembling in every limb. But it wasn't the scorpion he cared about. It was that, all at once, the thin shadows of isolated nails, the stains of murdered mosquitoes, the very scars and cracks of the wall, had begun to swarm, so that, wherever he looked, another insect was born, wriggling instantly toward his heart. It was as if, and this was what was most appalling, the whole insect world had somehow moved nearer and now was closing, rushing in upon him. (152)

The burden of the past becomes represented (or symbolised) by the insect population and thus, as the insects often harass him (and the other protagonists for that matter) wherever he moves, Lowry perhaps wishes us to imply that Firmin's 'sins' are also omnipresent and consistently bothering him or impinging themselves on his 'vision'. At one point, peering into his garden in a totally drunken stupor, the Consul has a horrifying experience in which he thinks

it was as though bits of his eyelids had broken off and were flittering and jittering before him, turning into nervous shapes and shadows, jumping to the guilty chattering in his mind, not yet voices yet, but they were coming back, they were coming back ... (148)

In a way the flittering and jittering insect life of Under the Volcano directly corresponds to the nervous shapes and shadows jumping around before the Consul's eyes; moreover, as potentially omnipresent and evil or nasty creatures most of the insects can also be compared in a way to the ominous voices which also haunt Firmin and which returned to him again and again. (Listing his types of delusion to Jacques, the Consul says: 'There are other minor deliriums too, meteora, which you can pick out of the air before your eyes, like gnats' (222).)

In order to underline the immediacy of the danger awaiting the Consul around every corner, Lowry chooses the example of the scorpion whose sudden sting can often entail death, and which strikes indiscriminately irrespective of class or creed (as, indeed, in the novel, does death itself). A kind of strange fascination appears to attract the Consul to the insect and he is not frightened of it, almost as if he courts toying with its lethal presence: 'Now a scorpion was moving slowly across towards him. Suddenly the Consul rose, trembling in every limb. But it wasn't the scorpion he cared about'(152). Later, as the Consul, Hugh and Yvonne leave the house, Geoffrey talks of 'infernal regions' and immediately afterwards discovers 'a scorpion on the wall' remarking: 'A curious bird is the scorpion. He cares not for priest nor for poor peon ... It's really a beautiful creature. Leave him be. He'll only sting himself to death any way'(191). Again the Consul's affinity with the scorpion (like his affinity with many other animals) is reinforced by Lowry when he makes the insect into another overt symbol for the Consul himself, who too is stinging himself to death with a lethal amount of poisonous alcohol. The scorpion, as a potentially suicidal beast, therefore aligns itself rather appropriately to the Consul's own suicidal mission. Later in the day, at Parian, the Consul points out to the bartender, A Few Fleas, another scorpion 'on the wall and the boy brushed it off with a vexed gesture: it was dead'(339). By now the Consul too has reached the apotheosis of his suicidal trek; already metaphorically dead to reason and a reversal of his intentions, Firmin, like the scorpion, 'not wanting to be saved'(339), is also soon to emulate the insect's fate, and thereby also enhance both the arachnid's as well as his own link with infernal regions.

In an explanatory letter concerning the Volcano written to Derek Pethick, Lowry notes that 'the whole book takes place "in Scorpio",<sup>22</sup> meaning that the 2nd November is to be found in the astrological segment of Scorpio. Staring into the night sky, Yvonne thinks: 'As Scorpio sets in the south-west, the Pleiades are rising in the north-east'(322). The Pleiades rising are soon directly to relate to Yvonne's 'ascension', which may imply that the logical other half of the equation must also symbolically entail Scorpio (the Consul) 'setting', i.e. falling into the ravine.<sup>23</sup> It is also perhaps of relevance that Scorpio belongs to the water signs in that Lowry possibly wishes to posit it as the Consul's own astrological house in order to correlate both with his interest in the animal itself as well as his fascination with the subaqueous Atlantis. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, writing of the Zodiac, says: 'Being the eighth sign, it is sometimes related to the eighth of the astrological houses, which is the house of death':<sup>24</sup> not only does this correlation fit the scorpion/Scorpio neatly into the death-orientated progression of Lowry's novel, set on the Day of the Dead, but the number eight also (coincidentally?) draws the eighth fairway of the Leasowe golf-course, with its yawning Hell Bunker, into the scheme.

Lowry's taste for linguistic games (puns or half-puns) places another arachnid, the spider, into interesting and relevant symbolical territory. In Chapter One Bustamente puts forward to Laruelle his idea that the Consul had been 'a sort of spy, or, as he put it, spider'(36). Whether Firmin has been in the past, or still is, an agent of some sort remains ambiguous throughout the text, yet the linguistic confusion (or embellishment) is returned to

at the Farolito where the Chief of Rostrums accuses Firmin of being 'a spider'(371). Ironically, various possible spies or counter-spies working either for the Fascists or the Cardenas government materialise at various points throughout the narrative especially at Parian; however, it is Firmin himself who suffers in this mass of intrigue to become the spider caught in someone else's web.

In Chapter Five Lowry exploits the spider again in a variation of his word play. Yvonne is arranging some bougainvillaea and she 'seems' to warn her brother-in-law that the plant has 'got spikes on it, and you have to look at everything carefully to be sure there're no spiders'(144-45). If these words are actually delivered seems to remain ambivalent yet they are mentally rendered, at least, from the Consul's point of view, as if he 'knows' the local equation of spider and spy and believes himself to be spying, from behind the bushes, on the domestic activities of his half-brother and ex-wife. In the phantasmagoria of his death throes the line about the spikes and the spiders is repeated verbatim and this is immediately followed by another voice saying, 'We shoota de espiders in Mexico'; directly afterwards it strikes the Consul that 'with this Hugh and Yvonne had gone'(375): in a sense Firmin partially justifies his death to himself because he believes he has been a spy/spider of sorts, if not on an international espionage level then on a domestic level within his own household.

In contrast to some of the more malicious insects which inhabit the world of Under the Volcano, Lowry employs the butterfly, at least in Yvonne's eyes, as a direct symbol of hope and aspiration. As Yvonne returns to Mexico to become reunited with

the Consul she sails into Acapulco harbour and Lowry renders 'a hurricane of immense and gorgeous butterflies swooping seaward to greet'(48) her boat. This image is provided in the middle of a large and convoluted sentence in which Yvonne is described standing in Quahnahuac square recalling both the distant and the immediate past;<sup>25</sup> moreover, the butterflies perhaps inspire her to connect the realms of a happy past and a potentially blissful future and thus provide her with courage and a new feeling of hope for her imminent confrontation with the Consul. However, as the novel progresses, Firmin himself directly undercuts or denies the butterfly its idyllic and carefree role. As he muses alone in his house Geoffrey perceives 'vague images of grief and tragedy flicker[ing] in his mind' and immediately afterwards thinks: 'Somewhere a butterfly was flying out to sea: lost'(92). The myriads of butterflies have, in the Consul's mind, been reduced to a single lost insect, out of its depth in the wide ocean (the butterfly now becomes a direct anticipatory symbol for Yvonne herself who at the end of the narrative will also be lost in the depths of the dark wood). Secondly, later in the day, perceiving the variety and profusion of animal life in his garden the Consul observes

huge butterflies, whose precise stitched markings reminded one of the blouses in the market, flopping about with indolent gymnastic grace (much as Yvonne had described them greeting her in Acapulco Bay yesterday, a storm of torn-up multicoloured love-letters, tossing to windward past the saloons on the promenade deck... (144)

Nowhere in the text does Yvonne describe the butterflies greeting her boat to Geoffrey; moreover, the precise simile Lowry had used to render their arrival was 'as though fountains of multicoloured stationery were being swept out of the saloon lounge(48), the point being that in the Consul's rendition of the event, in which the butterflies ironically become torn-up love letters, Yvonne's hopes of a new communication with Geoffrey become implicitly denied; and the image is probably meant to take us back to the letter written at the Farolito, and also not sent, and discovered far too late only to be subsequently torn up by Laruelle, as well as forwards to Chapter Twelve, where Yvonne's love letters to the Consul are also rediscovered too late to change the fate of a double death. Indeed, as she dies Yvonne transmogrifies the constellations she sees so that they somehow become 'beautiful butterflies'(335) and she once more remembers sailing into Acapulco. In this context the butterfly transcends its domestic role as a symbol for hope and aspiration on an earthly plane and becomes a kind of cosmic entity as Yvonne's hopes and aspirations transform towards a heavenly afterlife.

The bird life which inhabits Under the Volcano can, in the main, be divided into two groups. Essentially harmless, peaceful birds are consigned to the region of the northern paradise of the protagonists' dreams. Within Mexico itself, on the Day of the Dead, the vulture dominates the skyline menacingly awaiting 'only for the ratification of death'(255).

Considering a paradisaical life with Geoffrey Yvonne summons up the following picture:

a heron, that seemed made of cardboard and string, would flap past heavily, to alight majestically on a rock and stand there, tall and motionless. Kingfishers and swallows flitted past the caves or perched on their pier. Or a seagull would glide past perched on a piece of floating driftwood, his head in his wing, rocking, rocking with the motion of the sea ... (273).

The naive picture of this paradise in general, with its wooden hut erected on the shore and equi-distantly poised between the shielding forest and the protective sea, becomes enhanced by the birdlife which inhabits it with its heron 'that seemed made of cardboard and string'. In Mexico itself such 'happy' and carefree birds are rarely given chance to surface. The 'little secret ambassadors of peace, of love, two beautiful white tame pigeons'(234) are kept beneath the bus driver's shirt; the old Tarascan woman's little chicken is also not allowed to roam free but attached to 'a cord which she kept under her dress over her heart'(55).

Whilst Yvonne seeks a fellowship with Geoffrey and projects this idea forward on to her imaginary teeming bird sanctuary, the Consul employs a bird to hint at his own desire for isolation. In the garden Yvonne directs his attention at a red bird which she thinks is a cardinal; the Consul replies that she is mistaken and that it is, in fact, a coppery-tailed trogon, which he defines as:

a solitary fellow who probably lives way off in the Canyon of the Wolves over there, away off from those other fellows with ideas, so that he can have peace to meditate about not being a cardinal. (79)



The bird exerts an immediate influence on Firmin for he too wishes to be a solitary fellow living away from the people with ideas, especially away from the people with ideas of sobering him up; moreover, the isolated bird also mirrors the actions of his hero William Blackstone who 'got away from it all' by going off to live amongst the Indians. The Consul undoubtedly believes that he will gain a clearer insight into the meaning of something (if only his own personality) by breaking all links with his friends and associates and remaining totally alone. This plan may have once had some effect yet he does not truly put it into practice; his ultimate notion of isolation consists of the crowded Farolito situated dangerously too near its own 'canyon' - the abyss, above which the vultures hover.

In a seminal passage of Under the Volcano, Lowry underlines the importance and relevance to his tale of the carrion-eater itself:

Birds were sailing up there, ascending higher and higher.  
Infernal bird of Prometheus!

They were vultures, that on earth so jealously contend with one another, defiling themselves with blood and filth, but who were yet capable of rising, like this, above the storms, to heights shared only by the condor, above the summit of the Andes - (318).

Lowry's, and consequently the protagonists', dimorphic attitude to the vulture combines feelings of both disgust and admiration. The vulture is without courage to attack living prey; instead it hovers in the sky waiting only for death itself before it descends - in a way the Indian's actual death becomes confirmed by the descending

vultures mentioned at the close of the chapter (Eight) - yet it also shares something of a noble existence, 'rising' as its wings carry it ever higher into the sky. In a way the bird is again manipulated to become transformed into yet another animate symbol for the Consul: he too defiles himself with drink amongst the filth of festering and dirty cantinas frequently appearing to wait only for the 'ratification of [his own] death'(255) yet also proves himself capable of rising in order to achieve his own mythic destiny.

The Consul's familiarity with the vulture derives from his mescal-induced 'flights'. Recalling his terrible visit to Oaxaca in his unsent letter, the Consul writes that in his hotel room he found 'a vulture sitting in the washbasin'(41) and at the Farolito he remembers leaving his cheap room in Oaxaca, with 'the vulture sitting in the washbasin'(349-50), to go to 'El Infierno, that other Farolito'(349). Having become accustomed to the realms of darkness, and finding himself within metaphorical proximity, at least, to infernal regions, the Consul already stands, so to speak, with one foot in the grave; and is thus already partially in the domain of the demonic bird. Firmin's identification with Prometheus assists in completing the picture for us, for when Lowry refers to the bird as 'Infernal bird of Prometheus'(318) he ingeniously alludes to the destruction of the Greek hero's liver whilst, at the same time, enhancing the Consul's own heroic affinity with Prometheus (and thus the vulture) by also having him act as a vulture of sorts himself by destroying his own liver with excessive alcohol intake. In his commentary to Under the Volcano Samuel Beckoff notes that 'In the city of Tula, a Toltec pyramid dedicated to Quetzalcoatl depicts eagles and vultures eating bleeding hearts':<sup>26</sup> the Mexican

corroboration or extension of the Greek myth also fits well into a pattern in Lowry's novel for Yvonne's and the Consul's hearts are also helped to 'bleed' in various ways because of the presence on the scene of both vulture and eagle.

Quahnahuac, as we are soon informed, means, conveniently for Lowry, both 'near the wood' and 'where the eagle stops'(49), and it is the Consul who, yet again, now becomes the eagle for he too has stopped in Quahnahuac. The eagle is not greatly featured throughout the text yet it becomes symbolically prominent again in Chapter Eleven where, at the El Petate cantina, Yvonne comes across an eagle in a cage. As Yvonne frees the trapped bird there can be little doubt in Lowry's intention: the eagle is the Consul and the cage represents Yvonne's and Geoffrey's relationship; by setting the bird free Yvonne relinquishes what little hold she had on the Consul and renders him free to pursue his own solitary and roaming existence.<sup>27</sup> (Unfortunately, the Consul's metaphorical freedom is short lived for his new-found isolation merely evinces him plunging into the abyss. At Laruelle's the Consul conceives of his imaginary golf-course and thinks from his elevated position in the tower:

What a beautiful hole this would make, from here to a green out into those trees on the other side of the barranca, that natural hazard which some hundred and fifty yards away could be carried by a good full spoon shot, soaring ... Plock. The Golgotha Hole. High up, an eagle drove downwind in one. (206)

At the close of the novel the hazardous barranca and the golf hole itself become conjoined in a sort of new Golgotha; moreover, a 'hole in one' (Plock) at a short hole would be one executed in two

under par, and, in golfing terminology, constitute an 'eagle': at the close of Under the Volcano the Consul is made to become an eagle and thus he fulfils his ideal imaginary golf shot on his ideal imaginary golf hole by holing himself out downwards 'in one'.

The animals used by Lowry in Under the Volcano have had to perform many and varied functions, ranging from the crucially symbolic to the merely ornamental. Most beasts become united in Lowry's treatment though in that they bear some correspondence of sorts with the central protagonists, especially the Consul. The animals in the Volcano tend to achieve some logical coherence as a system of order precisely because of their continuous and active impingement on the scene at many, if not most, points in the narrative.

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# **PAGINATION ERROR**

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ANIMALS - NOTES

1. - David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano: Myth, Symbol, Meaning (New York, 1978), p.94.
2. - Lowry himself reiterating Cape's reader's comments on the positive aspects of his novel in Selected Letters (London, 1967) p.61.
3. - *ibid.*, p.61.
4. - *ibid.*, p.88.
5. - *ibid.*, p.88.
6. - Norman Friedman, Form and Meaning in Fiction (University of Georgia Press, 1975), pp.309-10. Friedman is discussing the traditional allegorical employment of animals in literature in general not just in Under the Volcano, though his list appears to fit Lowry's novel rather well.
7. - *ibid.*, p.310.
8. - B.W. Martin, The Dictionary of the Occult (London, 1979), p.56.
9. - See, for example, Antony R. Kilgallin, 'Faust and Under the Volcano', Canadian Literature (Autumn, 1965), pp.43-56.
10. - David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano, p.194.
11. - To have Yvonne trampled to death by the horse was, in point of fact, totally Margerie Lowry's idea - see Appendix One.
12. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.66. Perhaps Lowry's interest in the Wagnerian 'leitmotif', coupled with the fact that the horse makes numerous, repeated appearances in his novel, accounts in giving his 'horse opera' joke a possible secondary meaning.
13. - A further link in this pattern can be made if we recall that one of Firmin's occult books is entitled 'Serpent and Siva Worship in Central America'(178) and the Consul, as implied 'Vehicle of Siva', ends up in a central American 'serpentine barranca'(127).
14. - In the early stages of their bus ride to the Arena Tomalin, Hugh spots, firstly, 'a small black goat'; secondly, the ominous 'le gusta este jardin' sign; and thirdly, a man 'apparently the devil himself, with a huge dark red face and horns'(235).



15. - Later in the conversation the Consul terms the shrimps 'devilled scorpion[s]' (221) suggesting yet another stream of infernal linkage patterns between the devil, the goat, the cabrón, the camarones (shrimps), the scorpion, the devil, etc.
16. - It is perhaps again of relevance that Vigil's consulting-room is to be found in the Avendida de la Revolución [my italics] for the night and day between the Consul visiting it and his death forms yet another neat circle with the 'inquisitors' prefigured on Vigil's wall and, a day later, actualised in the Farolito.
17. - See B.W. Martin, The Dictionary of the Occult, p.135. Martin points out that a major meeting of witches, at which rites of initiation and sacrifice take place, is a 'sabbat' and that these events only take place four times during the year 'on the eves preceding 1 November, 1 February, 1 May and 1 August and it is interesting to note that they coincide with the four great festivals of the ancient Celts' (ibid., p.109). In Mexico the Day of the Dead does not directly coincide with the even preceding All Saints Day i.e. the 31st October, Hallowe'en, rather, it takes place on the eve following it, the 2nd November or All Souls Day, and Lowry may suggest that this is one of the year's four traditional dates for a Mexican witches' sabbat.
18. - Further evidence for regarding the Consul as a father figure of sports comes at the Farolito where he thinks to himself: 'Ah, if Yvonne, if only as a daughter, who would understand and comfort him, could only be at his side now' (361).
19. - At a few other stages in the novel a pair of animals are employed to openly anticipate the double deaths of the Consul and Yvonne: 'a man with the look of an executioner came from the street dragging two little fawns shrieking with fright into the kitchen. And later you heard them screaming, being slaughtered probably' (93); 'Two pullets lay, frightened and quivering, between the hand brake and the clutch, their wings linked with the levers. Poor things, they had signed their Munich agreement too' (240); 'it'll kill two birds with one stone' (307-08). In the above examples the number 'two', like the number 'seven', is also made to become a virtual 'fateful' digit - see Mirrorings.
20. - For a fuller discussion of the Consul's Oedipal connections, see David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano: Myth, Symbol Meaning, pp.29-31, 44-45.
21. - This simile, relating the snake to a belt on a pair of bathing trunks, perhaps also serves to remind us that Hugh and Yvonne bathe twice together during the day; the second occasion, at the Salon Ofelia, assisting in inciting the Consul to make his insidious remarks about their behaviour.

22. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.198.
23. - Further animate use of the constellations Yvonne sees to astrologically predict the novel's outcome is achieved when Lowry renders 'Pegasus pound[ing] up to the sky unseen'(331).
24. - Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Myths of the Zodiac (London, 1978), pp.78-79.
25. - The sentence is given a thorough syntactical and grammatical examination by Brian O'Kill in his 'Aspects of Language in Under the Volcano' in The Art of Malcolm Lowry, edited by Anne Smith (London, 1978), pp.75-79.
26. - Samuel Beckoff, Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano: A Critical Commentary (New York, 1975), p.69.
27. - The action of freeing the trapped bird links Yvonne with Hugh (they are, in fact, linked in many ways throughout the novel) for, in his reminiscences in Chapter Six, he recalls:

The seagull - pure scavenger of the empyrean, hunter of edible stars - I rescued that day as a boy when it was caught in a fence on the cliffside and was beating itself to death, blinded by snow, and though it attacked me, I drew it out unharmed, with one hand by its feet, and for one magnificent moment held it up in the sunlight, before it soared away on angelic wings over the freezing estuary? (155)

Lowry renders the seagull a 'hunter of edible stars', whilst in Chapter Eleven the eagle soars 'with a sudden cleaving of pinions into the deep dark pure blue sky above, in which at that moment appeared one star'(321). Moreover, 'a trapped bird' is introduced at another stage in the novel 'if only' as a simile: when Hugh, Yvonne and the Consul leave the house they hear the telephone ring, 'the tintinnabulation beating around the empty rooms like a trapped bird'(190).

LABYRINTHS

The instructions to turn always to the left reminded me that such was the common procedure for discovering the central point of certain labyrinths. I have some understanding of labyrinths: not for nothing am I the great grandson of that Ts 'ui Pen who was governor of Yunnan and who renounced worldly power in order to write a novel that might be even more populous than the Hung Lu Meng and to construct a labyrinth in which all men would become lost.

Borges, 'The Garden of Forking Paths',  
Labyrinths.

The image of the labyrinth has frequently been invoked in a general manner in relation to Lowry's work: Stephen Spender writes that Lowry's work is 'the pursuit of his own identity through

the labyrinth of his experiences',<sup>1</sup> whilst Richard K. Cross, speaking of Chapter One of Under the Volcano, refers to the remainder of the book in terms of 'the labyrinthine story about to unfold'.<sup>2</sup> This general assessment of Lowry's oeuvre, and more specifically Under the Volcano, as labyrinthine is appropriate enough, yet when left unexplicated and unspecified, hardly enlightening. Lowry's erratic working methods, his innumerable drafts of any given chapter or passage, his dense symbolic patternings and his wealth of extraneous allusion are all potential elements which could be said to contribute in endowing his work with a supposed 'labyrinthine' quality. Such abstract premises, useful though they are, would appear to become greatly reinforced when we examine Lowry's actual employment of the labyrinth metaphor within the context of his fiction in that it holds a pronounced and central position within his mythical and symbolical framework.

In Lowry's posthumously published novel, Dark as the Grave wherein my Friend is laid, Sigbjorn Wilderness, revisiting a familiar underground cafe (Wilderness is only a thinly-disguised 'persona' for Lowry himself returning to Mexico after an absence of eight years), ponders that

it was much as if by so entering the past, he had stumbled into a labyrinth, with no thread to guide him, where the minotaur threatened at every step, and which was moreover a labyrinth that now at each turn led infallibly to a precipice, over which one might fall at any moment, at the bottom of which was the abyss.<sup>3</sup>

The notion of becoming lost and its equation with the past, the concept of the labyrinth or maze leading infallibly onwards towards

a precipice and the abyss - these symbolic areas of cross-reference are also present continually to confront the protagonists of Under the Volcano; moreover, the allusion to the Cretan minotaur, also present, albeit in a disguised way, in the Volcano, here again places subsequent 'labyrinthine' action into an overtly 'mythic' or timeless zone. Only, therefore, by an awareness of Lowry's strategic placement of his maze imagery, and with a view to its overall structural role, can any real conclusions be drawn as to the precise labyrinthine quality which characterises his work. The employment of various actual and metaphorical labyrinths, plus their kindred relations, in the shape (or shapes) of spirals and vortices, accretes into a distinct ordering system, capable, as a growing repository of meaning, of casting many areas of the text into sharper focus. As with much else, the labyrinth accumulates and accentuates its own set of reverberations with each of its many and varied appearances; frequently (as in the case with the wheel, for example), it also performs a vital secondary function by often acting as an extended metaphor for the novel as a whole; only by means of some kind of precise examination of its overall role can we assess what Cross terms, yet leaves without further elaboration, 'the labyrinthine structure that characterises the Volcano'.<sup>4</sup>

Many of the labyrinth or vortex analogies have symbolic locations in the settings employed by Lowry throughout his novel, for example, in the lay-out of the ancient town of Quahnahuac with its numerous high walls, dark streets and concealed vistas (a detailed description of which dominates the book's opening pages); in the Consul's own dense and overgrown garden at the bottom of which lies the winding ravine; in the spiralling road route, over

hills and through sunken gorges, taken to Tomalin; and in the hellish dark forest, with its lethal choice of bisecting paths, in which Hugh and Yvonne become lost at the close. Such natural mazes, which seem almost inherent to the landscape of Mexico, or rather the landscape Lowry chooses to portray, are infrequently transcended when the action takes on an interior location: Bustamente's dark cinema; Laruelle's bizarre house with its many strange recesses (indeed during his visit the Consul thinks that 'the house seemed fuller of such recesses ... than usual'(211)); the dungeon-like Salon Ofelia; or the labyrinthine Farolito. Thus the overall impression given would seem to be that the characters are forever trapped or enmeshed, unable to find any true or lasting escape; admittedly, they are often to be found 'on the move' yet rarely, if ever, do they penetrate any given maze without being immediately confronted by another, and which, moreover, usually appears to be but an even more precarious continuation of the first. The labyrinth or maze therefore frequently encapsulates that eternal tension between action or movement and the 'element of "stasis"',<sup>5</sup> present in the novel, which Terence Wright so accurately observes in his essay. This dialectic is rapidly introduced at the beginning of the book when we encounter Laruelle, who, although he is apparently to leave Quahnahuac the following morning and still has to complete his packing, nevertheless trying 'to avoid his own house' in order to take 'a steep broken circuitous path that wound round behind the zócalo'(29).

The rapidly darkening town of Quahnahuac through which Laruelle takes his final stroll, acting as our guide in the process, indeed enables Lowry to announce his labyrinthine concerns virtually

from the novel's very beginning; in fact during only its second paragraph: Quahnahuac's 'streets and lanes' are 'tortuous and broken', its 'roads winding'; the 'fine American-style highway' which 'leads in from the north' becomes, as in due course will the protagonists, 'lost in ... narrow streets' to emerge as a 'goat track'(9).<sup>6</sup> In her book The Mystic Spiral, Jill Purce writes: 'In classical times, the labyrinth, together with its ritual circumnabulation, was essential to the creation of a city. This ritual imitated or re-enacted the original cosmic creation',<sup>7</sup> and Quahnahuac is also provided with a type of ritualised circumnabulation when innumerable processions are to be seen 'winding from the cemetery down the hillside behind the hotel'(10). These processions will, of course, reappear at various times in the course of the main narrative, taking place, as it does, exactly one year earlier, for they form an integral part of the Day of the Dead celebrations (in fact the Consul and Yvonne virtually bump into one as they return home from the Hotel Bella Vista in Chapter Two: a 'little cortege [which] slanted by swiftly in the direction of the town'(61)); and thus Lowry quickly manufactures a vital link between his own localised labyrinthine metaphors and a larger 'cosmic' life/death spiral; moreover, in the sense in which a circumnabulation is essential to the creation of a city he has also made it fundamental to the creation of his novel by continually attributing a specific structural role to any winding or 'circling' (10) movement.

As Laruelle slowly makes his way towards the cinema we are told that his 'way led through half-cultivated fields bordered by narrow grass paths'(15); such descriptions highlight the maze-

like nature of the Mexican terrain; they also suggest that there are numerous other paths or routes which one has the option of taking. Nevertheless, Lowry's protagonists consistently appear restricted in their options; a sense of fate or predetermination dominates; one which is accentuated by means of the author's own control of his narrative. The Consul's doom ultimately becomes apparent when Hugh and Yvonne take the wrong path to Parian; however, they take the wrong path because Lowry wishes the Consul's doom to become apparent. The characters have no hope of ever penetrating the maze in that when they threaten to do so, Lowry, as maze architect, deliberately changes the lay-out.

The path, so prevalent in Lowry's work (c.f. the novella 'The Forest Path to the Spring' where it offers a route through Paradiso as opposed to Inferno: 'the narrow path that wound down through the forest'(271) in Yvonne's imagined Canadian dreamland) invariably acts as a symbol for a spiritual quest or journey. Thus many apparently uncomplicated descriptions of paths running through countryside or townscape must frequently become detached from their immediate setting; or, rather, that setting must symbolically be regarded as telling us a lot more than its obvious employment as 'local colour'<sup>8</sup> or casual description. For example:

The path growing steeper inclined still further to their right and began to twist through scattered sentinels of trees, tall and lone, and enormous cactus, whose writhing innumerable spired hands, as the path turned, blocked the view on every side. It grew so dark it was surprising not to find blackest night in the world beyond. (324)

In this instant Hugh and Yvonne are in pursuit of the Consul; they



have taken the longer, indirect route to Parian and are now seemingly trapped in a natural maze unable to avoid the fate which awaits them 'en route'. The trees and cacti, described in a somewhat Expressionistic manner,<sup>9</sup> become animated and threatening; the path turns again and Hugh and Yvonne are virtually imprisoned unable to determine either exactly where they are or where they are going. At this stage they become literally lost in a Dante-esque 'dark wood', whilst references to the 'world beyond' undoubtedly suggest death, and in a Dante-esque context, Hell.

Metaphorical paths through mazes are remorselessly pursued by the Volcano's chief characters, usually though without any precise notion of where they will lead. The Consul, however, perhaps endows such trails with a somewhat more specific purpose in relation to his interest in the Cabbala and the occult: 'right through hell there is a path'(42) he writes in his unsent letter, and as the novel progresses he himself seems to be taking it. What Beckoff terms the Consul's 'supernatural quest'<sup>10</sup> would appear to have an objective correlative in the labyrinthine sub-structure which the Volcano itself possesses. Firmin's claim that he can 'dodge about in the rigging of the Cabbala'(87) emphasises his (and Lowry's) connections between magical or mystical significances and the net, web or labyrinth. Of course, the Consul's quest, whatever its precise goal, for various reasons, primarily his remorseless search for alcohol, becomes curtailed, and thus the image of the labyrinth or maze again provides Lowry with the opportunity of making his symbol appropriate on both an actual as well as an undercutting ironic level.

Throughout his final day the Consul is attempting, albeit haphazardly, to make connections, to 'trace pattern[s]' as 'on one of the porch tiles with his dress shoes'(78). He assumes the guise of the major adept operating within the 'paths and spheres of the Holy Cabbala'(89), apparently, or so he thinks, penetrating various mysterious mazes and vortices on the road to enlightenment. The Cabbala's 'private labyrinth',<sup>11</sup> whatever its precise relevance, offers Lowry an area of study in which the Consul can appropriately lose himself; moreover, because he would appear to be more 'inept' than 'adept' his enmeshment in the throes of the labyrinthine chaos becomes all the more evident.

Firmin also frequently revels in becoming a kind of Dostoevskian Underground Man. He makes a claim to Yvonne that 'people can be living in cellars the life of the old alchemists of Prague'(91), and he too appears to possess this desire to descend in order to explore perilous subterranean regions; whilst wandering around his garden he whimsically ponders that 'one might even climb down' the ravine 'if one wished, by easy stages of course, and taking the occasional swig of tequila on the way, ... visit the cloacal Prometheus who doubtless inhabited it'(134); he is forever, in Yvonne's words, plunging 'into this stupid darkness, seeking it'(54); and ironically, of course, he does eventually pay his visit to the abyss! This spiralling movement towards states of figuratively rendered Hell (see, for example, the Consul's vivid description of Laruelle's painting Los Borrachones:

Down, headlong into hades, selfish and florid-faced,  
into a tumult of fire-spangled fiends, Medusae, and  
belching monstrosities, with swallow-dives or  
awkwardly, with dread backward leaps, shrieking

among fallen bottles and emblems of broken hopes,  
plunged the drunkards (202-203) )

is, however, not always portrayed with solemnity because Lowry often extracts much incidental humour from such situations, for example, when the Consul conceives of an open cantina at the end of a dark lane with a dog guarding it'(82) which is perhaps to be ironically equated with Cerberus guarding the entrance to the underworld.

Of course, neither Hugh nor Yvonne escape this suction into subterranean-like passages, though they do not seem to possess the awareness to the 'symbolism' going on around them which the Consul has. On their idyllic ride together in Chapter Four they proceed through 'the cavernous entrance to the continuation of their lane' until they arrive at the pulqueria known as "La Sepultura"(113). (Much of the imagery and tone of this passage parallels that used to describe Yvonne's death - in fact it is at this very moment that we are first introduced to the fateful horse with 'the number seven branded on its rump'(113).)

The idea that an underground labyrinth corresponds directly with Hell is perhaps somewhat obvious; nevertheless, Lowry's subtle and ingenious variations on this theme still allow him to extract much thematically relevant material from it. Underground passages abound throughout the Volcano (reinforcing, on a literal level, Lowry's metaphorical claim, borrowed from Henry James, that 'There are depths')<sup>12</sup> entered by dark menacing recesses, often concealed, waiting to entrap any unsuspecting person rather in the

manner in which Leasowe's Hell Bunker 'yawned in such a position as to engulf'(26) wayward golf balls. Appropriately therefore, the Consul has, in a sense, a ready-made access to the netherworld on his own property in the shape of 'a dark entrance in the ditch' leading to an (abandoned iron mine running under the garden'(68); later Hugh notices that 'under the bank gaped a half-shored-in hole, another entrance to the mine perhaps'(103). Lowry's strategic placement of a labyrinth 'under the garden' and 'under the bank' is perhaps meant to emphasise the total labyrinth permeating Under the Volcano. Equally, Quahnahuac's primitive and inadequate sewerage system provides another type of nasty and perilous underground labyrinth, whilst its stench of course again serves to remind us of Hell.

Purce writes that 'a descent into the underworld (the kingdom of Pluto) is the theme of most initiation rituals, and is comparable to the passage through the wilderness, or the "dark night of the soul", which is experienced by mystics on their path. It is furthermore nearly always symbolised by the spiral'.<sup>13</sup> In the Volcano real 'paths' take on the role of ready made guides often through or down into a spiralling wilderness. The road which the bus takes to Tomalin, for example, is described in the following terms:

Hedges, with low steep banks, in which grew dusty trees, were hemming them in on either side. Without decreasing pace they were running into a narrow, sunken section of road, winding ... (243)

These paths, routes or roads forever lead the protagonists both onwards, and often also actually, as well as metaphorically, 'downwards'. Frequently, the characters appear like Dante and Virgil precariously picking their way through the maze of Hell, and Lowry occasionally makes direct allusions to the Inferno in support of his analogy. For example, compare the following descriptions of Yvonne and the Consul returning home from the Hotel Bella Vista with sections of Cantos X and XII of Inferno:

Their path made the short cut to the Calle Tierra del Fuego which curved below to meet them but the cliff was little better than a rubbish heap with smouldering debris and they had to pick their way carefully. (59)

- The Street of the Land of Fire! To their left raised high above road level, were uneven sidewalks with rough steps hewn in them. The whole little thoroughfare, slightly humpbacked in the centre where the open sewers had been filled in, was banked sharply down to the right as though it had once side-slipped in an earthquake. (60)

Dante concludes Canto X with: 'Then he [Virgil] turned his feet to the left and leaving the wall he went towards the centre by a path that strikes down to a valley from which the stench even up there was offensive',<sup>14</sup> whilst in Canto XII writes, 'So we took our way down that scree of stones, which often moved under my feet with the new weight'.<sup>15</sup> In terms of infernal comparisons it is also, of course, highly appropriate that the Consul's route takes him via the Calle Tierra del Fuego or the Street of the Land of Fire. In his commentary on Canto XII of Inferno John Sinclair points out that 'The earthquake of the Crucifixion, by which the precipitous sides of the great pit containing the Lower Hell were broken at parts into

great screams on which Dante can descend, was a shudder and convulsion of the world at the greatest of all crimes, committed against the supreme Love',<sup>16</sup> whilst in Chapter One of the Volcano Lowry informs us, through the consciousness of Laruelle, that 'when Christ was being crucified, so ran the seaborne, hieratic legend, the earth had opened all through this country'(21).

As Dante and Virgil penetrate ever deeper into infernal territory they inevitably take leftward turns; their continuous spiralling descent is one whose principal gyration is forever to the left. Purse perceptively observes that

The spiral is inherently asymmetrical, and any choice of direction along the vertical axis also determines a right- or left-handed path: the choice of travelling with or against the sun. That the latter, widdershins or 'sinister' direction has the association it does is an indication of man's close relationship with the movement of the heavens: it is said to be the entropic, unwinding movement from order into chaos, or, according to C.G. Jung, away from the conscious and towards the unconscious. 17

Significantly therefore, many, if not most of the turns the characters of Under the Volcano take are also leftwards; moreover, these leftward bends also, more often than not, appear to take them downwards: 'The road, broad, sidewalkless, ran with increasing steepness downhill, mostly between high walls, overhung by trees ... down to a leftward curve some three hundred yards away'(63). In the above sentence Lowry employs the word 'downhill' and this word alone forms the first paragraph of Chapter Eight where, in order for the bus to stop by the dying Indian, it makes an appropriate 'detour leftward too quickly'(243). In his letter to Cape, Lowry

characterises Chapter Eight as follows: 'Here the book, so to speak, goes into reverse - or, more strictly speaking, it begins to go downhill, though not, by any means, I hope, in the sense of deteriorating! Downhill (the first word), toward the abyss'.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the dying Indian is 'apparently lying fast asleep under the hedge on the right [my italics] side of the road'(243). Admittedly, by the time we reach Chapter Eight the equation between leftward turns downhill and the abyss may seem more clear-cut, nevertheless, Lowry has already frequently sought to permeate his text with such strategic comparisons, for example, 'Nearly all the large residences [of which the Consul's house is one] were on their left, built far back from the road towards the barranca'(63). Thus what may appear, for the protagonists at least, to be simply 'directionless' wanderings through the terrain of the town and countryside are in fact endowed by Lowry with distinctly larger and thematically pertinent patternings - having set them off on their infernal explorations, their subsequent downward and leftward spirallings map out the tone for the remainder of the novel by foreshadowing the ultimate fate which awaits them. In a sense, the chapters of Under the Volcano could be compared to the Rivera murals which depict 'a slow darkening ... as you look from right to left'(215).

Lowry's labyrinthine spirals continuously project the narrative flow forwards towards the novel's culmination until entrapment becomes a complete and a re-tracking or reversal of the situation impossible. Terence Wright, writing of Chapter Four, states: 'Probably the most successful parts of the novel are those like Hugh's and Yvonne's ride, in which we feel there is an

autonomous 'life' flowing without authorial arrangement',<sup>19</sup> yet the 'authorial' arrangement is as pronounced here as at many other points in the text. Yvonne and Hugh come across a goat, undoubtedly a symbol for the Consul, 'regarding them with patriarchal contempt'(103), which then charges, narrowly missing them, only to pursue a 'leftward bend'(104) down towards the ravine; moreover, Hugh and Yvonne follow the animal's trek, suggesting perhaps how the Consul perhaps will too lead them, literally, 'ravinewards'. Later they pursue the route of a sunken railway track which 'curved away in a wide leftward sweep of such proportions one felt it must logically come to involve itself again with the Tomalin road'(119) - Hugh and Yvonne no longer follow it though the increasing leftward curves which they themselves will take in due course lead them to their own subsequent 'involvement' with the Tomalin road. Thus again Lowry's charting of leftward spirals allows him the opportunity of oblique and subtle commentary on the direction of events the novel will take. In his Dictionary of the Occult, B.W. Martin defines the left-hand path as:

A term which may sometimes be used generally to refer to practices and methods that differ from the accepted or normal, but more usually specific in its application as implying a deliberate choice between two ways (often broadly classified as 'good' and 'evil'). Those who follow the left-hand path have chosen the path of 'evil'.<sup>20</sup>

Admittedly, it is difficult to regard most of the left-hand routes taken by the protagonists as implicitly 'evil', for example, when the Consul leaves the cafe Paris his 'steps teetered to the left, he could not make them incline to the right'(223), his lack of directional sense is perhaps more determined by his gradual



inebriation, 'away from the conscious and towards the unconscious', to manipulate Jury's definition; nevertheless, it is interesting to notice that when Hugh and Yvonne are confronted with their two alternatives of real paths they do not 'chose the path to their right [which] would reach Parian much sooner'(319), instead they choose the longer route 'to the left'(319) through the dense maze-like jungle. As already suggested then the novel's labyrinthine spirallings tend to veer consistently towards the left - the Farolito at Parian then, in which the final chapter takes place, would therefore appear to represent the apotheosis of this constant left-ward movement: it acts as the metaphorical Satan of Lowry's inferno. A subtle way in which Lowry pre-empts this expectation for us is through his use of a pun on the word 'sinister' which is, of course, to be equated with its etymology from the Latin 'sinistre' meaning left-handed. Thus Hugh brings a complex series of ordering devices into play with his off-hand comment that there is 'something sinister about Parian'(119); likewise, the 'dark open sinister bunkers'(68) observed by Yvonne open up associative links between Leasowe's Hell Bunker and the section of ravine at Parian where the Consul will end up - the golf course's bunker is situated 'slightly to the left'(26) too!

The Farolito at Parian is the culmination of many of the novel's labyrinthine strands with its rooms being described as 'boxes in [a] Chinese puzzle'(344).<sup>21</sup> It is here that the winding 'procession[s]'(342) first observed by Laruelle a year 'later'(or some 340 pages 'earlier') return to make their final appearance, thus emphasising the ever-present spiral of life and death which nobody can transcend. In the Consul's mind the Farolito is also compared

to the significantly named 'El Infierno, that other Farolito'(350) he has visited in Oaxaca, yet unlike the Infierno here the labyrinth terminates in death and there is to be no final 'escape through the secret passage'(351) which the former cantina offered; whilst the Infierno had a 'lamp of hope ... glowing beyond the dark open sewers'(350) here no such ray of light shines through; the Consul is unable to negotiate the 'dark open sewer' which now must become synonymous with the barranca itself. In a sense the Consul, at long last, reaches the epicentre of the maze in which he has been trapped all day (if not all his life) yet he must remain there; the underground regions he has been wishing to explore metaphorically become an actuality, when, by nature of a kind of 'subterranean collapse'(338), he finds himself in the even more perilous labyrinth of the abyss itself.

It is in the heart of the Farolito also that Lowry introduces and manipulates the myth of the minotaur. Purse remarks that: 'At the centre of the spiral labyrinth, man meets, overcomes, and thus unites with Hunibaba or the Minotaur, the "monster" of his own hidden nature, and is reborn into a new state of wholeness. The centre is thus a symbol for the state of balance, of no-time or infinity'.<sup>22</sup> Certainly the Farolito possesses a kind of timeless quality, as Markson observes: 'the Consul notices a clock "pointing to six" - and when he looks again some time later he finds that it "still said six"';<sup>23</sup> furthermore, whilst the Consul re-reads Yvonne's letters, 'his brain "remains" at an agonized standstill'(346). (Tony Kilgallin characterises this stasis which appears to permeate the Farolito as a product of 'the constant dynamic flow between opposing poles, the law by which everything runs into its opposite'.)<sup>24</sup>

It is against such a static environment, which I characterised earlier as a natural product of Lowry's labyrinthine metaphor, that the minotaur analogy or analogies operates. Markson claims that 'the Union Militar will ... prove the literal "monster" in Lowry's fable',<sup>25</sup> and to some extent this is the case; nevertheless, it is the prostitute Maria who releases the 'monster' of the Consul's own hidden nature by leading him to the actual centre of the Farolito's maze:

At first he saw only the shapely legs of the girl who was leading him, now by the constricted power of aching flesh alone, of pathetic trembling yet brutal lust, through the little glass-paned rooms, that grew smaller and smaller, darker and darker, until by the mingitorio, the 'Senores', out of whose evil-smelling gloom broke a sinister [my italics] chuckle, there was merely a lightless annex no larger than a cupboard... (348)

(For someone with Lowry's penchant for word-play the link between minotaur and 'mingitorio' (lavatory) is pronounced, even by his standards.)

In the Farolito the Consul is finally caught in the ultimate net, web or labyrinth. Often, it would appear that as the tired and mescal-dazed Consul wanders aimlessly around from crowded bar to dingy bedroom and back again he becomes the archetypal 'lost soul' alluded to in one of Yvonne's letters, 'one that turned from its true path and is groping in the darkness of remembered ways'(346), yet, in a sense, he is in familiar territory and somewhat less lost than Hugh and Yvonne clambering aimlessly through the dense surrounding jungle.

Separate images of mazes and ruins all culminate at Parian, Lowry again often foreshadowing the terrain which will greet the Consul on his arrival there: in his letter Firmin alludes in a mysterious way to 'the shadow of old monasteries' and of taking his 'guilt into cloisters and under tapestries'(41), whilst in Chapter Four Yvonne tells Hugh that Parian is

the old capital of the state. Years ago there used to be a huge monastery there. I believe - rather like Oaxaca in that respect. Some of the shops and even the cantinas are part of what were once the monks' quarters. But it's quite a ruin. (119)

The cloistered ruins provide not only a natural labyrinth 'per se' but also constitute an enmeshment with remnants of the past - such remnants which are scattered throughout the novel, for example, the ruined Borda gardens, not only suggest that the Mexican setting has always been labyrinthine, but their varying stages of decay and collapse make the present protagonists' paths all the more precarious and chaotic. Yvonne had said that Parian used to be the capital of the state; in this way it could be regarded as its centre, the centre of the maze for which the Consul has been searching all day, yet the old centre has now collapsed; instead it provides a new centre as Fascist headquarters - the Consul's quest for the 'sense of the past' (it is at the Farolito where he left Yvonne's letters) is denied him as a new web of intrigue, that of the present, takes over.

The barranca also terminates at Parian. Literally, it also terminates the Consul's existence. In the Farolito the Consul finds himself mentally tracing 'the barranca's circuitous abysmal path back through the country, through shattered mines, to his own

garden'(340); the ravine has been following him all day, yawning menacingly, waiting. Structurally, in this context, it performs the function of acting as a consistent deeper sub-labyrinth, even more hazardous, indeed fatally so, than the surface maze through which the Consul has already been travelling. Its sinister labyrinthine presence has also dominated many of the day's events, in that much of the novel's action takes place within its proximity (for example, Chapters Four and Five); even as she flies in to Quahnahuac, Yvonne sees 'a gorge winding darkly beneath'(50). Purce observes that 'The Mexican feathered serpent shows the union of heaven (bird) and earth (snake)',<sup>26</sup> and these two polarities are forever being epitomized in Quahnahuac whose name means 'where the eagle stops' yet which is bisected by a 'serpentine barranca'(127). Thus the Mexican plumed serpent, represented in art in the shape of a spiralling coil, offers another apt metaphor for the kinetic yet static condition in which the characters of the Volcano, specifically the Consul, find themselves. With Yvonne's release of the eagle (Chapter Eleven) the 'bird-like', or aspirational, qualities of the mythic beast become symbolically rejected, whilst its 'snake-like' earthly attributes, in the shape of the winding ravine, into which the Consul is about to be tossed, take over.

The macro-structure pertaining to the novel as a whole which informs the labyrinth metaphor, for example, in the ravine or in the convoluted lay-out of the ancient town of Quahnahuac or in the quest motif played out against a background of various spiralling journeys, by bus, air, sea or on foot or horseback, is given a parallel micro-structure to complement it within the individual himself in the shape of the brain, intestines, nervous system, etc.

Purce writes:

Both the winding forms of the intestines and those of the brain have been depicted in religious and symbolic art as the labyrinth or spiral path, which creates, protects, and lays the foundation of the new town, temple or centre, and which opens to the man of knowledge and understanding. 27

In terms of the Consul it could be argued that alcohol has to some extent destroyed both his brain and intestines, or at least his mind and body, and thus that the 'temple or centre' which these organs help to create has been destroyed too; instead of the inner organs therefore providing an obstacle-free labyrinth, assisting in establishing well-being and knowledge, they prove, in Firmin's case, diseased and malfunctioning. Vigil tells the Consul that 'The nerves are a mesh'(148) (Lowry probably also wishing us to think that Firmin's nerves are a 'mess'). The doctor goes on to compare the nervous system to an electric system and adds: 'But after much tequila eclectic [sic] systems is perhaps un poco descompuesto, comprenez, as sometimes in the oíne : claro?'(148). One recalls that when the cinema's electricity supplies fail Lowry terms the event a 'suspended function'(32) and in terms of the Consul's own body most of his functions too have become suspended. In other words the labyrinthine external world which leads him perilously nowhere except to stasis and death is mirrored in his body which, by nature of its rapid decomposition, performs an identical task. The Consul terms the Farolito a venue where 'great wheeling thoughts hovered in the brain'(204) yet, by the time he gets there, these wheeling thoughts have turned inward on themselves so much so that the Farolito represents entrapment rather than escape - appropriately,

his reaction to Yvonne's letters charts that

he did not now need to comprehend any meaning in the words beyond their abject confirmation of his own lostness, his own fruitless selfish ruin, now perhaps finally self-imposed, his brain, before this cruelly disregarded evidence of what heartbreak he had caused her, at an agonized standstill. (346)

In a way the Consul regards the Farolito as a kind of womb<sup>28</sup> where he will be naturally protected from the horrors of the actual or real world (he appears to regard most cantinas in this light - cantina literally means cave); also where he has the opportunity of becoming continually re-born into a higher consciousness. Purce says, 'creation myths are at once microcosmic and macrocosmic. The first phase in the ego's development appears mythologically as the cosmic egg. The egg is formed by the inturning or involution of Being'.<sup>29</sup> The egg's pre-birth involution is reflected in the labyrinthine, spiralling nature of most of the novel's cantinas (especially the Farolito) because for the Consul, as Gass remarks, 'a cantina signifies the rich enticing inwardness of all things'.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the Consul frequently seems to realise this mythic connection between the labyrinthine external world and its microcosmic equivalents in the shape of the brain or the embryo. For him the penetration of the external labyrinth is often accompanied by a realisation that he must also locate an inner sanctuary which he has to pass through in order to re-emerge on a higher stage of the Cabbalistic tree. Thus from the womb/tomb-like lavatory of the Salon Ofelia he recalls having said at the onset of Hugh and Yvonne's meal: 'And our poor spoiling brains and eggs at home' (296) - a remark the other two surely fail to understand. Earlier in

the day he had mentioned to Yvonne the fact that during her absence the town had had a flood so that the 'drains of Quahnahuac visited us and left us with something that smelt like the Cosmic Egg'(71), again perhaps revealing the awareness of personal re-creation or a re-birth after a minor local flood in relation to the macrocosmic re-Creation after the Genesis flood. The Consul would obviously regard his book on Atlantis, were he ever to complete it, as constituting a major step up the Cabbalistic tree: significantly, in terms of his local flood story he is trying to 'work in something about ... Noah'(91); unfortunately his book is not to become completed in that, as he already 'knows', and says himself whilst discussing it, it will be 'Interrupted by his untimely death'(91); yet, in a sense, that death might also in itself be something akin to re-birth, and thus the Farolito will finally become a sort of womb. In terms of Under the Volcano as the first part of Lowry's Modern Divine Comedy, the Consul's death marks the end of the downward spiralling of Inferno and announces the beginning of the upward spiralling of Purgatorio. The labyrinth/brain imagery, which terminates in stasis and stagnation in the womb-like Farolito, suggests that the still centre of one phase will indeed have been reached and traversed; moreover, the downpour which accompanies the Consul's death suggests that this time the Flood will be of significant magnitude to bring about a new era. In Chapter Three the Consul had conceived of the entrance to a cantina as the 'jewelled gate the desperate neophyte, yesodbound,<sup>31</sup> projects for the thousandth time on the heavens to permit passage of his astral body'(94), and, in a way, the Farolito becomes the gateway which permits passage; unfortunately for the poor old Consul his astral body is not permitted to pass through



without his actual body accompanying it.

The web or net allows Lowry an elegant variation on his basic labyrinth theme. It suggests not merely entrapment but also entanglement, frequently providing a literal vortex, where one becomes tied down; unable to escape; condemned. The bull in the Arena Tomalin encapsulates, symbolically, the plight of the novel's protagonists, especially the Consul:

The poor old creature seemed now indeed like someone being drawn, lured, into events of which he has no real comprehension, by people with whom he wishes to be friendly, even to play, who entice him by encouraging that wish and by whom, because they really despise and desire to humiliate him, he is finally entangled.(259)

Later 'four more lassoes'(261) catch the bull and the 'final enmeshment in the toils of enemies'(261) becomes complete. Here it is as if the rope (Ariadne's thread) leading one through a respective maze has become twisted and muddled; one becomes tied up in the frantic gyrations rather than assisted:

The bull pulled against the opposing forces of ropes a while longer, then subsided gloomily, swinging his head from side to side with those shuffling sweeps along the ground, into the dust where, temporarily defeated but watchful, he resembled some fantastic insect trapped at the centre of a huge vibrating web ... (270)

The web or net perhaps also subtly offers Lowry a general metaphor for the novel itself, and to some extent both his characters and readers become conjoined in this context. Just as the Consul or Yvonne, for example, could be said to become enmeshed or entangled,

like the bull, in events over which they appear to have little control, so we, as readers become, to some extent, equally enmeshed or entangled in those same events. Inside a web or net or labyrinth chaos would undoubtedly appear to dominate yet were we to stand outside the pattern would become clearer and more defined; such a dichotomy is one Lowry toys with throughout the Volcano thus inherently providing his labyrinth imagery with a fascinating dual role. Ultimately, as readers, we are able to stand back and marvel at the complex creation in which we are simultaneously enmeshed; with the possible exception of Laruelle (see Towers), the protagonists do not have this opportunity. In his garden the Consul perceives that 'Between floribunda and rose a spider wove an intricate web'(71), yet when the web became larger and more all-encompassing he becomes drawn into it and is no longer able to comment on its intricacy; he becomes like the bull trapped in its very centre. Dale Edmonds, concluding his aptly named 'Mosaic of Doom' reading of the novel's 'immediate level', notes, after a pertinent analysis of the events leading to the Consul's death:

Thus the last piece has been fitted into the intricate mosaic of doom which Lowry constructs for his protagonist. Each piece is an indispensable part of the whole; the composite of all the pieces seems as indivisible and as inevitable as a great work of art. Indeed, I am tempted to argue that the Consul's passage to his death is the most significant and aesthetically satisfying event in his whole life, which has been a compendium of uncompleted projects, unfulfilled promises, and unrealized potential. 32

This would indeed appear to be the case, yet, unfortunately, the Consul himself is much too immediately involved in his own perilous predicament to derive any aesthetically satisfying

pleasure therefrom. As first time readers of the novel we accompany the protagonists through their labyrinth, feeling no doubt as lost as they are; with every re-reading of the text we assume an increasingly higher position; the maze becomes transcended; its lay-out more apparent.

Walker writes: 'the various clusters of chthonic images gradually mesh into a web of doom which entraps the characters',<sup>33</sup> and this is surely apparent. Ultimately perhaps those chthonic images, of which the labyrinth itself is one, also entrap us. Hopefully I have been able to demonstrate some of the symbolic roles it plays, yet finally, like the wheel, it perhaps must be seen as representing something of the form of the book itself; in this sense, some of its functions must remain ambiguous in order for Lowry to maintain the elusive 'Labyrinthine structure that characterises the Volcano'.<sup>34</sup>

Speaking of Joyce's use of the riddle in Finnegans Wake, Patrick McCarthy says, 'the riddle is a form of verbal labyrinth whose purpose is to puzzle or mislead'.<sup>35</sup> In terms of Under the Volcano one could say that the labyrinth is a form of verbal riddle whose purpose is to puzzle or mislead too.

LABYRINTHS - NOTES

1. - Stephen Spender, 'Introduction', Under the Volcano (London, 1965), p.xix.
2. - Richard K. Cross, Malcolm Lowry: A Preface to his Fiction (London, 1980), p.27
3. - Malcolm Lowry, Dark as the Grave wherein my Friend is Laid (Harmondsworth, 1972), p.97.
4. - Cross, op.cit., p.69.
5. - Terence Wright, 'Under the Volcano: The static art of Malcolm Lowry', Ariel, Vol.1, No.4(1970), p.67.
6. - Two of the words Lowry employs here in his factual description have larger repercussions in determining how the notion of a labyrinth without any escape provides one of the novel's dominating images:
  - (i) 'north' is returned to in Chapter Eleven where the Consul's unfinished poem ends with the line: 'Who once fled north...' (331); the Consul himself, however, unlike the autobiographical protagonist of his poem, must end his life in Mexico and is not given the chance to return to a northern paradise. Indeed Yvonne's thoughts on the poem's last line confirm the Consul's inability to escape: 'Nor had the Consul fled north ... he'd probably gone ... to the Farolito'(332).
  - (ii) 'goat': Beckoff informs us that 'a "tragedy" is literally a "goat song"' (Samuel Beckoff, Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano: A Critical Commentary, (New York, 1975) p.85) and thus the characters' track, like the one which leads out of Quahnahuac, ends in tragedy.
7. - Jill Purce, The Mystic Spiral: Journey of the Soul (New York, 1979), p.29.
8. - See Lowry's quotation of Jonathan Cape's reader's comment: '"Mexican local colour heaped on in shovelfuls"', Selected Letters, p.61.
9. - See Sherril E. Grace, 'Malcolm Lowry and the Expressionist Vision', The Art of Malcolm Lowry, ed. Anne Smith (London, 1978), p.96.

'Following Kant reality for the Expressionist resides primarily in the mind of the perceiver, not in the observable, objective world, nor in universals. Although the existence of an objective world is not denied and may, in fact, be used by the artist, it is present only insofar as it evokes an inner reality.'

Later in her essay Grace discusses the 'disruption of temporal continuities' she evinces in Lowry's work and connects it to an 'impression of stasis' she sees as present in 'so much Expressionist art'(p.99).

10. - Samuel Beckoff, Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano: A Critical Commentary (New York, 1975), p.104.
11. - See Perle S. Epstein, The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry: Under the Volcano and the Cabbala (New York, 1969).
12. - Lowry, Selected Letters, p.65.
13. - Purce, The Mystic Spiral, p.30.
14. - Dante, Inferno, trans. Sinclair (London, 1971), p.139.
15. - *ibid.*, p.157.
16. - *ibid.*, p.163.
17. - Purce, The Mystic Spiral, p.6.
18. - Lowry, Selected Letters, p.78.
19. - Terence Wright, 'Under the Volcano: The static art of Malcolm Lowry', Ariel, Vol.1, No.4 (1970), p.76.
20. - B.W. Martin, The Dictionary of the Occult (London, 1979), p.73.
21. - Markson notes many similarities between the description of the Farolito and Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland and terms such as a 'distortion' an Alicelike concept. See David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano: Myth, Symbol, Meaning (New York, 1978) p.184.
22. - Purce, The Mystic Spiral, p.99.
23. - Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano: Myth, Symbol, Meaning, p.184.
24. - Tony Kilgallin, Lowry (Ontario, 1973), p.200.
25. - Markson, *op.cit.*, p.190.
26. - Purce, The Mystic Spiral, p.101.
27. - *ibid.*, p.27.
28. - William Gass terms the cantinas as the 'warm womb of the world', also as 'the head itself, the container of consciousness'. See William H. Gass, 'Malcolm Lowry', in The World Within the Word (New York, 1979), p.19.

29. - Purce, The Mystic Spiral, p.16.
30. - Gass, The World Within the Word, p.19.
31. - 'Yesod' is situated half-way up the Tree of Life, literally in a Purgatorial position.
32. - Dale Edmonds, 'Under the Volcano: a reading of the "immediate level"', Tulane Studies in English, No.16 (1968), p.91.
33. - Ronald Walker, 'The Barranca of History: Mexico as Nexus of Doom in Under the Volcano', in Infernal Paradise (Los Angeles, 1978), p.246.
34. - See note 4.
35. - Patrick A. McCarthy, The Riddles of Finnegans Wake (Newark, New Jersey, 1980), p.30.

TOWERS AND IVORY TOWERS

I pace upon the battlements and stare  
On the foundations of a house, or where  
Tree, like a sooty finger, starts from the earth;  
And imagination forth  
Under the day's declining beam, and call  
Images and memories  
From ruin or from ancient trees,  
For I would ask a question of them all.

Yeats, "The Tower".

Just as Lowry provides us with a detailed description of the  
labyrinthine nature of the town of Quahnahuac and its environs,

so he is equally eager, for various reasons, to reinforce an impression of the towers and turrets which his Mexican setting also possesses - on his walk Laruelle perceives the 'dark castled shape of Cortez Palace' (16) as well as the 'walls and towers of the out-skirts' (17) of the town. Indeed, frequently, the action thrives on a subtle interplay of tower and labyrinth imagery [see below]. The protagonists are caught in a series of mazes whilst they are often watched from above by military police officers who assume a similar guise, in many respects, to Big Brother in Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four. In a somewhat different way [see below], Laruelle from his tower also assumes the role of a 'controller' figure, whilst the notion of the concealed tower as menacing and threatening is given elegant variations throughout the text, for example, in the 'fake freighters' recalled by Hugh, 'turning into turreted men-of-war at a moment's notice' (135), or in the neat equation of Jacques's 'camouflaged' towers being 'almost like the Samaritan' (198).

One of the prime themes which dominates the novel's tower imagery is that of escape or refuge and this has complex ramifications on a variety of different levels. The tower acts as a sort of hide-out from private tribulations, from public exposure, from the everyday problems of life; even, in fact, from 'life' itself. Of the four central protagonists, the two eldest (Laruelle and the Consul) are the ones for which the tower holds such pronounced symbolic functions. Jacques lives in a house with two towers, whilst Geoffrey continuously angles his final day's quest forward to the Farolito - the little lighthouse, which he regards as his own personal tower-like sanctuary. Laruelle lives alone (indeed he is even more alone in the year



following his friend's death), whilst the Consul too is forever seeking isolation and solitariness: as Yvonne sleeps he searches for an isolated cantina; he visits Senora Gregorio's alone; at the Salon Ofelia he deliberately cuts himself off from his two companions; moreover, he constantly expresses a desire to reject civilisation altogether by going off to live amongst the Indians like his hero William Blackstone. The tower thus encapsulates the possibility of escape from the claustrophobic landscape of the Mexican jungle-like terrain. Yvonne notices the 'miradors cut off, floating above the lonely rooftrees of the soul' (68) and a 'mirador' literally means a raised vantage or viewing point. (In a sense the Consul is already elevated to such an isolated position when we, and Yvonne, first encounter him in the Hotel Bella Vista, (also literally meaning 'good view'.)

The tower, like the volcano itself, as well as the various other slopes and inclines which appear throughout the book, must also be seen, in a related context to its function as escape route, as hinting at the possibility of Purgatorial ascent out of the netherworld, and thus tying in with the novel's third and final epigraph; that from Goethe's Faust: 'Whoever unceasingly strives upward ... him can we save' (7). Borosz informs us that during the 'European Middle Ages ... towers symbolised a link between earth and heaven'<sup>1</sup> and in the novel's opening pages Laruelle recalls 'the twin spires of Chartres Cathedral'<sup>2</sup> appropriately 'rising into the sunlight' (18). The tower's paradisaical associations are returned to when the Consul dreams of a 'white beautiful cathedral city' (303) through which he can wander with Yvonne; he thinks of a 'white sanctuary of [a] church' with 'white towers' (304). That this is

a picture of a heaven of sorts is reinforced when the clock on one of the towers is described as 'timeless' (304). (See also Gardens and Paradises.)

Nevertheless, within the immediate context of the actual Mexican setting of the Volcano the tower frequently represents, or is associated with, both restriction and collapse. Connotations of internment and immurement appear when it becomes equated with a prison. During his ride with Yvonne Hugh spots the 'latticed watchtower of the Alcapingo prison' (103); a little later he notices that 'The watchtower, nearer, taller bloomed above a wood through which they just made out the high prison wall' (109). Sometimes towers appear to be imminently toppled, as when a plane zooms over 'narrowly missing a mirador' (193); often they are in a state of decay or collapse, for example, 'the emperor's [Maximilian's] mirador ... certainly had seen better days ... birds perched on the blasted towers and dilapidated masonry' (127). The aura of disintegration with which many of the novel's towers are imbued therefore suggests a symbiotic disintegration of human aspiration; indeed, a downright reversal of the ascent/salvation relationship, 'the blasted tower being the destruction of God's house',<sup>3</sup> as Epstein informs us. Aspiration which inherently implies collapse is further maintained in the novel's complex series of allusions to the Tower of Babel.

In Chapter One Laruelle recalls having visited the ancient city of Cholula with the Consul and climbing its 'ruined pyramid ... which he [Geoffrey] had proudly insisted was the original Tower of Babel' (17). The fact that the Consul terms the ruined pyramid the original Babel is not simply a flight of fancy.

He is alluding to a section of Ignatius Donnelly's book, Atlantis: The Antediluvian World, in which the American hermeticist notes that 'In one form of the Tower of Babel legend, that of the Toltecs, we are told that the pyramid of Cholula was erected "as a means of escape from a second Flood, should another occur"'.<sup>4</sup> (Significantly, Laruelle posits the rain which accompanies his walk as sufficient to form 'dark waters rising to engulf his own zacauli in the Calle Nicaragua, his useless tower against the coming of the second flood' (35).)<sup>5</sup> Although, mythically at least, the pyramid of Cholula may once have constituted a refuge from a cataclysmic flood, by the time the Consul visits it it appears to be far too ruined and dilapidated to perform such a role. Indeed, part of Firmin's fascination with the pyramid seems to lie in its ruined and crumbling condition; and appropriately, the 'round hill' on which it stands is rendered as being enveloped in 'dust' and 'dust-darkened' (17) in order to perhaps symbolically depict the pyramid's, or in the Consul's terms, Babel's corrosion. Dorosz writes: 'the Consul's drunkenness is projected in the image of a Tower of Babel which, crashing down to the earth, forever buries his true self. Drunkenness is thus associated with a disaster brought about by man's arrogance and unlawful magical practices'.<sup>6</sup> Yet this would seem an overstatement of the Babel situation: the Tower of Babel at Cholula comes into play without any mention of the Consul's drunkenness; moreover, Lowry depicts it as slowly deteriorating rather than crashing down to earth about to bury the Consul's 'true self', whatever that may be. Firmin's interest in the pyramid, as is the case with his interest in other towers and pseudo-towers, could rather be termed as Romantic; that is, in this context, that a refuge from the strifes of the present can be located in remnants from the past. The past

can never be fully regained and this the Consul knows, yet its ruins can nevertheless be nostalgically explored. The Consul's obsession with Atlantis clarifies his position in this respect for, according to Donnelly, Atlantis became submerged by a large flood. The Consul appears to revel in being an explorer of Atlantis and the novel's towers are, in this context, remnants of the antediluvian world, the Atlantean world, and to explore and inhabit them is therefore synonymous with entering a lost era. (That the Consul regards the terrain in which he operates as metaphorically flooded is demonstrated in a number of ways, for example, he takes 'a strangely subaqueous view of the plains and the volcanoes' (132), he compares the summit of Popocatepetl to a 'gigantic surfacing whale' (80), and recalls that when he first came to Mexico some of its dwellings 'reminded [him] of those houseboats on the Shalimar' (82).) Associated with this process of archaic exploration is an awareness that ruination is a fundamental constituent element of all man-made structures.<sup>7</sup> The Consul's desire nostalgically to revel in this decaying aspect of human endeavour is also reflected in his own drinking which simply accelerates the processes of disintegration within his own body. By giving the Farolito the title of the lighthouse that invites the storm, he projects onto it the parallel symbiotic collapse of his own physical state, the rapid corrosion of which becomes greatly quickened whenever he visits Parian. Viewed with the hindsight of history the Babel idea appears necessarily doomed to failure even before it got off the ground, as it were, and the Consul too realises this; his desire to scale or inhabit towers is thus not to be regarded as a process whereby he seeks self-deification - on the contrary it charts his personal realisation that such aspirational hopes are redundant in that eventually a greater force than man will bring about their downfall.

The tower as an initial aspiration which gradually crumbles and collapses beneath one's feet is a symbolic undercurrent ingeniously maintained on a slightly different level when it becomes transformed into a windmill and Lowry alludes to (and manipulates) Don Quixote tilting at windmills in this respect. Aspiration as an illusion which quickly turns to disillusionment reaches a climax when Hugh half-heartedly attempts to help the dying Indian by the roadside but fails; the Consul dismisses the situation with the comment: 'Never mind, old boy, it would have been worse than the windmills' (250), suggesting Hugh's intervention on the scene would have amounted to a deranged act comparable to many of Don Quixote's. A connection between the Indian and the windmill had already been announced in Chapter Four when Hugh and Yvonne see the man and his horse for the first time and immediately afterwards spot 'a toy windmill ... twirling restlessly in the breeze' (113). (The restless 'twirling' again underlines the implied cyclicity of the novel's form, acknowledging that in the not too distant future we will encounter Indian, horse and windmill again.) At the Salon Ofelia the morning's events are recalled and here the windmill resumes its thematic link with non-Samaritism when Hugh and Yvonne idyllically reminisce about their morning ride instead of helping to save the Consul who now is the one about to die. That a Don Quixote association is being implied is demonstrated in the Consul's interruption of the conversation as he calls for the cafe's proprietor:

' - crossing the river, a windmill - '

'Cervantes!' (297)

(Markson remarks 'not every windmill implies a Don Quixote tilting at it. But since like all such details, windmills will reappear

[they are] again then less than "incidental" '.)<sup>8</sup> Don Quixote as 'illusioned' Spaniard also gives a germane undercurrent to Hugh's disillusionment with the Spanish Loyalist predicament - admittedly he says he will sail to Spain with a shipload of dynamite yet he realises that the situation there is already a lost cause. The introduction of the book's windmill imagery has been laid by Laruelle in Chapter One where he recalls that at Leasowe 'There was an island in the estuary with a windmill on it like a curious black flower' (23); in the previous sentence Lowry mentions the 'old shabby deserted lighthouse' (23) in the same vicinity. Whereas at the close of the book the Consul reaches the Farolito, his lighthouse, for Hugh, the 'gigantic' forces of oppression will only remain metaphorical windmills. One could ride out to the windmill at Leasowe 'on a donkey' (23) - not only does Hugh fail to help the dying Indian but, by acting as a sort of Judas to the Consul's Christ, he also brings about the latter's Calvary (not for nothing is Parian compared with Golgotha). Finally, the windmill at Leasowe is said to resemble 'a curious black flower' (23) and again Cervantes (the Cervantes of the Salon Ofelia), as a man begins to play a guitar in the background, informs us that 'Black Flowers is the name of the song' (307). We are last to see Hugh playing his newly-acquired guitar in the isolation of a Mexican dark wood far removed from the actual fighting at that moment going on in Spain, his revolutionary songs acting as a hollow echo only of real revolution; in fact, as a kind of Quixotic 'windmill'. A final subtle variation on the windmill/disillusionment theme is introduced by Yvonne when she dreams of seeing herself in a famous film called 'Le Destin de Yvonne Griffaton' (267), and just before she enters the cinema passes a nightclub called the 'Moulin Rouge' (268). The first image to fill the screen

is a 'shadowy horse, gigantic [which] seemed [to be] leaping of it at her' (268) which foreshadows not her destiny as a famous actress but merely the destiny of her death. For Don Quixote the illusion was reality; for Yvonne the cinematic 'illusion' becomes reality too. At the time of Yvonne's death even the illusory windmill (if we concede that it has been transformed into a millwheel) becomes destroyed and obliterated: 'the millwheel reflections of sunlight on water were burning' (336); moreover, Lowry, always eager to maintain symbolic linkage patterns throughout his text, tells us 'the flowers in the garden were blackened and burning' (336) (*my italics*) too. At the end of Women in Love Ursula and Birkin find solace and contentment in a windmill yet for the Consul and Yvonne such solace and contentment is denied them, even within its context as solely an illusion.

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At the time of his death Henry James left two novels unfinished; their titles were The Sense of the Past and The Ivory Tower. Earlier I characterised some of the ways in which the towers in the Volcano symbolised, for the Consul at least, a sense of the past; this theme is maintained and elaborated upon when it becomes incorporated into a notion of the towers as 'ivory towers', that is as locations wherein the detached artistic consciousness can operate. The book's two artistic consciousnesses are Laruelle and the Consul (appropriately Laruelle's house has two towers, one for each of them) yet neither appear to be working at the full extent of their powers by the time we encounter them: Laruelle left Hollywood four years earlier and has stopped making films, whilst the Consul's remorseless

alcoholic quest seems to have all but terminated his own literary endeavours.

The dilapidated condition of the Volcano's towers again serves Lowry well in this respect in that their decay mirrors the parallel disintegration of Jacques' and Geoffrey's creative potential; and again the sense of the past theme ties in here in that when they seek refuge and protection in towers they seek an accompanying escape in an artistic way of life, which, although it may no longer really exist, has the tower as its lingering symbol. Although within the immediate context of the Day of the Dead 1938 the Consul's and Laruelle's artistic potential is not given any substantial expression, Lowry can still endow them with the attributes of ivory tower artists, especially as the ivory tower temperament with which they are imbued is really a larger view of life in general rather than simply an ensuing by-product of any specific creativity. Furthermore, the Consul was a writer of sorts in the past, as his letter to Yvonne and strange poem demonstrate, whilst Laruelle may once again become a film director of sorts in the future, especially if we take seriously Lowry's own comment that, after Chapter One, 'we can look at the rest of the book through Laruelle's eyes, as if it were his creation.'<sup>9</sup> (Opinion has it that Stephen Dedalus, although he wastes most of the 16th June 1904 in other pursuits, may be posited by Joyce as the future creator of Ulysses. It is perhaps significant that he too lives in a tower.) In Under the Volcano past and future creativity may again be symbolised in the twin towers of Jacques' house situated at the novel's centre, one metaphorically looking back over the terrain already traversed, the other looking towards the future across terrain still to be explored.



The term 'ivory tower' was coined in the 1860s by the French critic Sainte-Beuve (Laruelle is of course also a Frenchman) to signify artists who elevated themselves above the mundane preoccupations of everyday existence preferring instead to inhabit a private realm where art-for-art's sake was the prime motive or 'modus operandi'. Although the term was initially intended as pejorative, by the 1890s various artists and aesthetes readily aligned themselves to the ivory tower 'tradition' (as it had by that time become); some, like Yeats for example, even lived in real towers in order to emulate in actuality the stance of other-worldliness reflected on a metaphorical level in their work. (In a sense the Martello tower in which Stephen Dedalus lives at the beginning of Ulysses demonstrates that the aesthetic theory propounded at the end of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man has now virtually become a way of life.) Both Laruelle and the Consul were born in the 1890s; both have elements of an elitist, almost aristocratically detached arrogance in their make-up; both discuss the virtues and advantages akin to an artistic view of existence. The Consul compares himself to both Swinburne and Oscar Wilde, whilst he classifies his own genius 'in an extraordinary manner' as that of his 'old and good friend, Abraham Taskerson, the great poet, who once spoke so glowingly of [his] potentialities as a young man' (133); Laruelle believes that Hugh regarded him as a 'precious type of bore, the elderly aesthete' (14). In his book on the artist as hero Beebe notes that a 'Quest for self' is the dominant theme of the artist-novel, and because the self is almost always in conflict with society, a closely related theme is the opposition of art to life. The artist-as-hero is usually therefore the artist-as-exile.<sup>10</sup> Both the Consul and Laruelle are exiles; when Hugh first meets

Laruelle he immediately regards him as 'in some state of exile'(193).

The opposition of art to life is given extended play throughout the text. The inscription ' "No se puede vivir sin amar" '(11) which is set in a panel on Laruelle's house becomes redundant if one upholds the virtues of art over those of life.<sup>11</sup> Literally the phrase means 'one cannot live without love' yet Laruelle himself, ironically, seems to live quite well without love; he terms the inscription as having been set into his wall by an 'estupido' (11). Furthermore, Laruelle recalls the phrase in the novel's opening pages immediately after he notices 'the lights of Quahnahuac's one cinema, built on an incline and standing out sharply' (11) flickering on and off, Lowry no doubt intending a pun between 'sin amar' and 'cinema'. If we substitute 'cinema' into the phrase then it means 'one cannot live cinema', yet Laruelle, as director of and actor in the Consul's last day, does precisely that. When the Consul comes across the inscription in Chapter Seven the phrase itself is not repeated in the text (so much so that as first or second time readers we may have difficulty knowing to what the lettering he sees on Jacques' house refers) yet the manner in which it is presented is rather accurately portrayed: 'a panel of rough stone, covered with large letters painted in gold leaf, had been slightly set into the wall to give a semblance of bas-relief. These gold letters though very thick were merged together most confusingly' (199). The precious and aesthetically elegant manner in which the inscription has been executed thus, in a sense, contradicts what it says in terms of Laruelle's and the Consul's (and Lowry's) upholding of the values of art in opposition to and above those of life. The Consul 'does not allow himself' (199) to

remember the phrase but instead enters the towered dwelling recalling, instead, that he had 'come to be almost more familiar with [the] extraordinary house than his own' (199); and simultaneously revealing that he too has preferred the rarified atmosphere of the tower.

Maurice Beebe entitles his book on the artist as hero Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts.<sup>12</sup> In it he counterbalances artists who immerse themselves in ivory towers with those who drink of the sacred fount of life. This metaphorical dialectic is, of course, highly appropriate on an actual level in Under the Volcano. Throughout the book the Consul comes to reject fountains with all their itinerant connotations of life-enhancing purification preferring instead to slake his thirst with alcohol, and, during the final hours of his last day especially, with the hallucinogenic mescal.<sup>13</sup> His abhorrence of fountains carries with it a symbolic denial of the potential of life offered to him were he to stop drinking and demonstrate his love for Yvonne. In Chapter One Lowry describes 'a fountain ... where a cactus farmer had reined up his horse to drink' (11) yet at the end of the novel the Consul releases the horse which destroys Yvonne; moreover, the downpour which accompanies this action reveals that at this stage the water is no longer controlled or controllable, as in a fountain, but savagely threatening and demonic. The singlemindedness with which the Consul has engineered his way ever-onward to the Farolito, his ivory tower, his lighthouse that invites the storm, brings about both his death as well as Yvonne's; nevertheless, Lowry depicts this overwhelming desire as far from negative - when Laruelle notices a horseman in Chapter One, 'his eyes wild as those soon to look on death' (28), he thinks 'suddenly, this maniacal

vision of senseless frenzy, but controlled, not quite uncontrolled, somehow almost admirable, this too, obscurely, was the Consul ...'(28).

The question Firmin poses himself whilst at Laruelle's: 'Could one be faithful to Yvonne and the Farolito both?' (205) again not only heralds a choice between marriage and drunkenness but between life and art, especially as alcohol is made to become a sort of perverted 'aqua vita', its properties necessary in propelling the artist to his own peculiar brand of visionary expression in a similar way in which opium fired certain Romantic imaginations.<sup>14</sup> (Appropriately, whilst at Laruelle's, the Consul thinks of the Farolito in a manner 'that suggested Kubla Khan' (204).)<sup>15</sup> It is not until the end of the novel that we come to realise that the Consul's faithfulness will be towards the Farolito rather than towards Yvonne yet Lowry perhaps already answers the question for us virtually at the same time as it is asked! 'The Consul's longing was so great his soul was locked with the essence of the place [the Farolito] as he stood and he was gripped by thoughts like those of the mariner who, sighting the faint beacon of Start Point after a long voyage, knows that soon he will embrace his wife'(204): for Firmin the Farolito, the little lighthouse, becomes the wife the mariner in Lowry's simile longs to embrace.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, when the Consul ponders Yvonne's adultery with Laruelle in the room in which he at that moment stands, he thinks: 'in how many rooms, upon how many studio couches, among how many books, had they found their own love, their marriage, their life together' (205); his inclusion of 'studio couches' and 'books' perhaps demonstrating his own preference for the isolated sphere of art than for the shared communion of love. If Laruelle did have an affair with Yvonne (the text itself leaves the

question tantalisingly unspecified) we can safely assume that it was not because he was passionately in love with her. The Consul imagines them as having made love amongst Jacques' collection of cuneiform stone idols' (203) suggesting that Laruelle regards Yvonne as simply another 'objet d'art', as a part of his collection. In Chapter One Laruelle thinks of himself as having 'a rather unctuous possessive manner towards women' (14) and recalls that 'He had acquired a Mexican mistress ... and numerous beautiful Mayan idols' (16). The Consul too 'acquires' a Mexican mistress of sorts with whom he copulates in his own 'tower' (the Farolito) in the shape of the prostitute Maria; the sexual act is again depicted as onanistic and, in a perverse sense, it becomes a piece of performance art and is provided with a spectator in the dwarf who watches it. Beebe writes of Roderick Usher as a failed artist in terms which are here appropriate to the Consul: 'The power to create is the power to destroy and his most triumphant creation is the obliteration of his suffering, diffused self in a return to that oneness which is nothingness.'<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the Consul's ivory tower does finally crumble and collapse in a similar way in which his Babel collapses and in a similar way in which the House of Usher collapses.<sup>18</sup> Quoting Donnelly to Laruelle, the Consul had spoken of 'the spirit of the abyss, the god of storm, "huracan", that "testified so suggestively to intercourse between opposite sides of the Atlantic" '(22): his literal 'intercourse' with the Mexican girl leads to a mystical invocation of 'the spirit of the abyss, the god of storm' and assists in bringing about his own destruction. Employing his tower as a phallic symbol, Lowry thus makes the Consul's 'lighthouse' invite the storm of destruction Firmin has been longing for all day.<sup>19</sup> During a previous dark night of the soul at the Farolito the Consul

had written his long letter to Yvonne; in the hour before his death Yvonne becomes rejected, the procreative physical act with Maria replacing the creative mental act of writing associated with Yvonne. At the close of the first chapter Laruelle sets fire to the Consul's letter placing it in an ashtray 'where beautifully conforming it folded upon itself, a burning castle, collapsed' (47). The Consul's ultimate denial of Yvonne is also the denial of the creative potential of art and also the denial of the ivory tower as the venue where art can be created. In Chapter Twelve the Consul himself sets fire, metaphorically, to his manuscripts; his tower collapses to become a burning castle, the lightning-struck tower depicted on the sixteenth Tarot card. As she dies, Yvonne realises that the northern paradise she has envisaged inhabiting with Geoffrey was but a fantasy and that now any hopes of reconciliation and a shared future together must needs also become destroyed, and thus the Consul's book is rendered as 'burning, the pages were burning, burning, burning' (336). Lowry describes the letter Jacques burns as 'beautifully conforming it folded upon itself' (47): the novel's beginning and end also fold upon themselves and Laruelle's ignition of the letter beautifully conforms to a logical pattern which, though hinted at throughout, does not surface until the Volcano's denouement.

The Farolito deliberately mirrors many of the towers encountered along the way there, just as it mirrors and epitomises many of the novel's labyrinths. Thus it becomes implicitly reflected in the 'old shabby deserted lighthouse' (23) on the sea shore at Leasowe which is situated amongst the remains of an antediluvian forest, just as Parian is situated in a real forest, also awaiting a flood; in the dilapidated and crumbling pyramid

of Cholula, the original Tower of Babel (during the confusion before his death the Consul becomes aware of only the stool pigeon's voice 'rising above the clamour - the Babel ... the confusion of tongues' (367) ); in the 'numerous watchtower[s], the eternal mirador[s] of Parian state (67); in the 'latticed watch-tower of the Alcapancingo prison' (103) - the Farolito had also once been a prison, and during Firmin's final hour there, still is. It even strikes an appropriate 'reverberation' in Hugh's recollection of Juan Cerillo 'shot at by enemies of Cardenas in reverberating church towers' (111): the Consul's frequent allusions to the Farolito as a kind of sanctuary reinforces its church-like quality, as does the ominous 'bell' (372) he hears just before his death. Moreover, the Farolito's ivory tower associations are introduced by direct comparison with Laruelle's twin-towered house in which the Consul thinks long and hard about the role the little lighthouse plays in his life. (It is at Laruelle's that the Consul becomes the creator or architect of the imaginary golf-course he envisages as stretching towards Parian, the Farolito its nineteenth hole.) The Farolito's rooms recede to one no larger than a cell which could be compared to a monastic cell where the writer goes about his business; as he ascends one of Laruelle's towers the Consul quotes from Shelly's Alastor: 'God, that the dream of the dark magician in his visioned cave, even while his hand shakes in its last decay ... were the true end of this so lousy world' (206). At the Farolito 'diabolical plots [are] hatched, atrocious murders planned' (204) and, in terms of the immediate action taking place during the Consul's final visit there, these plots are hatched and murders planned for real, yet, in another sense, they are really only 'fictional', contrived solely in the writer's mind. Ironically,

the writer's (dark magician's) fiction (dream) culminates in the 'true end' of both the Consul's life as well as the book written about him. In his letter composed at the Farolito, the Consul expresses 'a desire to destroy [himself] by [his] own imagination' (45): in a sense this wish becomes fulfilled.

Earlier I posited Laruelle as the novel's implied controlling consciousness and this is a subject to be imminently returned to, yet the Consul himself, in his role as visionary artist (albeit as failed visionary artist), to some extent already performs a similar function. (In his letter to Cape Lowry says that 'the four main characters [are] intended, in one of the book's meanings, to be aspects of the same man, or of the human spirit.')<sup>20</sup> Dale Edmonds writes:

In regard to his book, on the Day of the Dead the Consul conceives in his head several chapters - maybe volumes - of 'Secret Knowledge.' He may have 'no capability for the further tactile effort' (41) of writing this material down, but that is of little consequence, for, as the Consul affirms, 'the final frontier of consciousness' (139) lies within. 21

Undoubtedly, the Consul's book on Atlantis, his 'Secret Knowledge', could be said (in some ways) to resemble Under the Volcano itself, which Lowry himself toiled at for years, sometimes seeming as far away from completing it as the Consul is from completing his own book. When Yvonne's final dream envisages Geoffrey's book as going up in flames, Lowry probably drew the incident from the time in 1944 when his own shack went up in flames and he (or rather Margerie) had to rescue his manuscripts.<sup>22</sup> The Consul's letter offers the world of the Volcano in a microcosmic form; placed as



it is in Chapter One it provides an interpolated introduction, within an introduction, to the rest of the novel; written in the Farolito on Hotel Bella Vista notepaper, it metaphorically compresses the action of Chapters Two-Twelve. Even Lowry's description of the Consul's handwriting foreshadows much of the contents of Under the Volcano:

But there was no mistaking, even in the uncertain light, the hand, half crabbed, half generous, and wholly drunken, of the Consul himself, the Greek e's, flying buttresses of d's, the t's like lonely wayside crosses save where they crucified the entire word, the words themselves slanting steeply downhill, though the individual characters seemed as if resisting the descent, braced, climbing the other way. (41)

The Consul's 'hard' suggests Orlac, the artist with murderer's hands; it is 'wholly drunken', as he will be during the course of his final day; the d's and t's represent the d.t's, the delirium tremens, from which he himself will suffer; the 'flying buttresses' add another architectural accessory to the whole 'churrigueresque cathedral',<sup>23</sup> as Lowry was fond of calling his novel; 'lonely wayside crosses' will appear in the narrative; the Consul as Christ-figure will become metaphorically 'crucified' at the book's close; roads and ravines will slant 'steeply downhill'; 'individual characters' may or may not be seen as 'resisting the descent', etc., etc.

There can be little doubt that Laruelle/Lowry (the similarity of names is perhaps not unintentional) has created in his tower-like house a supreme 'ivory tower' from which he escapes

the pressures of the 'real' world below. The house's studio is filled with books and 'objets d'art'; various volumes are 'strewn all over the floor and stacked almost to the ceiling'(202); its walls boast two paintings by Rivera, 'Orozco charcoal drawings', as well as the picture Los Borrachones which 'resemble[s] something between a primitive and a prohibitionist poster, remotely under the influence of Michelangelo' (202). (In that the picture represents a series of helpless inebriates, it is ironic that it should be painted 'under the influence' of someone as 'sober' as Michelangelo!) Moreover, the room also contains Jacques' collection of 'cuneiform stone idols' (203), the 'numerous beautiful Mayan idols' (16) already alluded to in Chapter One.

As potential film-maker<sup>24</sup> of the day's events, Laruelle's towers might be said to act as twin director's chairs from which he surveys the action; his transposable head-camera might be compared to the 'inquisitive binoculars ... on the watch-tower'(109) which pursue Hugh and Yvonne throughout Chapter Four. Whilst on the top of one of Laruelle's towers Hugh himself uses binoculars and gets 'Parian in pretty good focus' (203) as a director may well do, especially if the climax of his film is to take place there. From the back of one of the towers it is possible to see 'cloud shadows wheeling across the plain' (199), suggesting perhaps a camera panning across the same piece of terrain. Whilst the Consul is left alone on one of the balconies, an 'observation plane' (211) flies over, no doubt, in this double-take scenario, 'taking' an aerial shot; the Consul thinks of it as 'looking for him perhaps, zooming ...'(211). Indeed, it is possible to construct an entire film-set around some of the actions and events described in Under the Volcano partly because

Lowry's language is frequently identical to cinematic jargon: at one point in Chapter Seven the Consul says to Laruelle that he hasn't 'explained just how Hugh fits into the picture' (215) almost as if he were collaborating on its screenplay.

Beebe writes, 'the artist of the Ivory Tower tradition seeks annihilation of the suffering, human self in order to free the creative spirit that represents the God in man.'<sup>25</sup> In a sense, Laruelle's close involvement with the other three protagonists must too be relinquished before he can assume the distant God-like stance necessary to free the creative spirit and use his ivory tower as the centre-piece of his own objective filmic essay. William Gray terms the original title of the Tarot pack tower card as 'the "Maison de Dieu" (House of God) ... an old euphemism for a madhouse, the mad being considered as in "the care of God" '<sup>26</sup> As he encounters the other three, Laruelle suggests that they drop into [his] "madhouse" '(194): unfortunately, they do not remain there long enough for him to care for them, yet, in his God-like position as director, he may be said to take extreme care in immortalising them 'on film'.<sup>27</sup>

As with the wheel and the labyrinth, the novel assimilates the image of the tower to act as a metaphor for its own formal construction. In his letter to Cape, Lowry refers to Chapter Twelve as 'the easterly tower, Chapter 1 being the westerly, at each end of my churrigueresque Mexican cathedral.'<sup>28</sup> (Chapters One and Twelve are further linked when the tower becomes transformed into a lighthouse, present in the 'deserted lighthouse'(23) in Jacques' remembrance of Leasowe and in the Consul's description of the Farolito as 'the

lighthouse that invites the storm'(203).) Significantly, Jacques' towers are 'joined by a catwalk over the roof, which was the glassed-in gable of the studio below' (198) - in this sense the book as art work can be equated with its 'studio-like' position between the 'towers' of its opening and conclusion; moreover, Lowry perhaps also intends a connection between Laruelle's studio and a film studio in that, as he claims in his letter to Cape, the book can be regarded, amongst many other things, as 'a preposterous movie'.<sup>29</sup> (In Dark as the Grave, where Wilderness is appropriately expounding an aesthetic theory in Laruelle's house, he asks himself: 'For is not the building the work of art in question';<sup>30</sup> the 'work of art' Wilderness refers to is his own novel The Valley of the Shadow of Death, Lowry's original title for Under the Volcano.) In Chapter Ten of the Volcano itself, the Consul, perusing a guide-book for the state of Taxcala, reads of the San Francisco convent, that 'on the right side of the entrance is erected a majestic tower' (299): another pair of towers in between which events are fictionally constructed is suggested in this respect when we recall that he had met Yvonne near a 'nunnery' (45) and eventually relinquishes her in the tower/monastery-like Farolito. The concept of the book as 'a building erected between twin towers' is given further elaboration and variation in Chapter Eleven when Yvonne thinks she sees 'a ruined Grecian temple, dim, with two tall slender pillars, approached by two broad steps ... perfect in balance and proportion' (331).<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the twin towers of Laruelle's house, situated as they are at the novel's formal centre (the beginning of Chapter Seven) again serve to tie together its beginning and its end - one tower reminding us of Laruelle's own references to his towered dwelling (as well as to the twin spires of Chartres), in Chapter

One, the other projecting the narrative forward to the Farolito, that pseudo-tower of Chapter Twelve. These two towers which 'dominate' so much of the novel's action are moreover mirrored by the twin volcanoes which hold similar positions of authority, and thus Lowry's employment of the word tower is often used to describe them: 'the volcanoes ... towered up over the jungle' (316), or 'Popocatepetl towered through the window' (340).

Under the Volcano's towers and their 'variants' (198) thus perform manifold and complex functions, as indeed do most of Lowry's symbols. Aspiration and its parallel disintegration is a prime theme and this is reflected, in Babel; in the lighthouse that invites the storm; and in the Quixotic windmills; also, in a way, in the Consul's partial rejection of the Farolito as ivory tower. Towers collapsing and crumbling are though balanced by towers still under construction: Laruelle's 'film' of the Day of the Dead which really analogously simply represents the novel itself, a novel conceived and written in the ivory tower tradition.

TOWERS AND IVORY TOWERS - NOTES

1. - Kristofer Doross, Malcolm Lowry's Infernal Paradise (Uppsala, 1976), p.28.
2. - Lowry had himself visited Chartres in the summer of 1934 and written a story there called 'Hotel Room in Chartres' - the story concerns 'a former seaman who wishes to return with his wife to Chartres; where once, before their marriage went wrong they had wandered in the cathedral'.  
See Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography (London, 1974), p.189.
3. - Perle S. Epstein, The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry: Under the Volcano and the Cabbala (New York, 1969), p.132.

4. - See Ignatius Donnelly, Atlantis: The Antediluvian World [1882] (San Francisco, 1971), p.203.

Donnelly's book, which the Consul in fact has cause to mention (91), solves another couple of Under the Volcano's mysteries for us as well. He notes that 'the Noah of the Mexican cataclysm was Coxcox' (op. cit. p.99), whilst the Consul, in his own book, wishes to 'work in something about Coxcox and Noah' (91). Furthermore, when the Consul had proposed that Laruelle make a film about Atlantis, the latter notes that Firmin had spoken to him 'about the spirit of the abyss, the god of storm, "huracán", that "testified so suggestively to intercourse between opposite sides of the Atlantic" ' (22). This weird statement is, in point of fact, virtually a verbatim quotation from Donnelly, who says, 'I may note that this word hurakan - the spirit of the abyss, the god of storm, the hurricane - is very suggestive, and testifies to an early intercourse between the opposite shores of the Atlantic' (op. cit. p.103).

Donnelly also has cause to mention the extensive use of the term 'black cloud ... in the story of the Deluge as told [by the] Central Americans' (op. cit. p.102): as Lowry's Day of the Dead draws to a close his foreshadowing of the terrible thunderstorm which accompanies the novel's denouement will also see him as making similar extensive use of the 'black clouds', for example, 278, 318, 324, 331 and 347.

5. - Laruelle's thoughts here must, I think, be taken metaphorically, rather than literally, in that it would take some forty or so feet of water to actually 'engulf' his tower; as his house also stands on a steep incline, as I discovered when I visited its model in Cuernavaca, the proposition seems all the more unlikely. In terms of some of the other

information and imagery of Chapter One, the oncoming second Flood could be equated with the oncoming Second World War: in such a context Laruelle's imminent sea voyage to France would be regarded as synonymous with the flood which sweeps away his Edenic existence in Quahnahuac. Moreover, it could be argued, in terms of Lowry's fascination with cyclic parallels and recurrences, that the Consul's own sea voyage on the s.s. Samaritan during the First World War destroyed the innocence of his idyllic Edwardian summer - significantly, Laruelle recounts his 1911 holiday in England as having 'fizzled out in desolation and equinoctial gales' as he returned to Calais on a 'sea-swept channel boat' (27).

6. - Kristopher Doross, Malcolm Lowry's Infernal Paradise, p.77.
7. - In his story 'Present Estate of Pompeii', Lowry writes, 'the difference between the man-made ruins and the ruins of Pompeii was that the man-made ones had not for the most part been found worth preserving, or had been carried away. Had some precious part of man been carried away with the ruins? Partly it was as if man built with ruin in view.'  
See Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place [1961] (Penguin, 1979), p.200.  
(Pompeii as a place 'flooded' by the lava from the volcano Vesuvius certainly appealed to Lowry's obvious geo-physical interests.)
8. - David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano: Myth, Symbol, Meaning (New York, 1978), p.28.
9. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters (London, 1967), p.71.
10. - Maurice Beebe, Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce (New York, 1974), p.6.
11. - In his Biography, Douglas Day places great emphasis on this phrase relating it to the Consul's damnation: 'And the Consul is damned. One can't live without loving' (p.349). He also tells us that 'the words come from Fray Luis de Leon, the sixteenth-century Spanish ascetic poet-priest' (pp.264-65). It would appear rather ironical that the saying was coined by a priest in that he would himself have been deprived of sexual love. Day goes on to say that 'On the religious level Fray Luis de Leon's words take on their ultimate meaning: without loving God, one cannot live eternally' (p.349). This is not the place for an extended debate on whether or not the Consul loves or believes in 'God' (Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, what have you), however, in a sense, eternal life of sorts is already granted to the artist in that his works live on after his own demise. Although one may perhaps not be able to 'live' without loving, Lowry suggests that one can certainly create.

12. - See Note 10.
13. - As Dale Edmonds says, Lowry 'reveals a serious misconception about this drink' - it is neither a drug, nor does it have a greater potency than tequila: 'there is no essential difference between mescal and tequila'. See Dale Edmonds, "Mescalusions or The Drinking Man's Under the Volcano", Journal of Modern Literature, Vol.6, No.2 (Spring, 1977), p.279.
14. - Edmonds writes that 'the Consul's plunge has its moments of bliss and glory and that drink is the Consul's mistress, his nurse, his God, no matter what dark fate awaits him' (op.cit. p.283).
15. - It is ironical that the sober Quincey more or less shares the same name as De Quincey, the English opium eater.
16. - Under the Volcano shares with Virginia Woolf's novel the same remorseless desire to reach the 'lighthouse'; moreover, the symbol's precise meaning is left equally vague or unspecified in both works.
17. - Maurice Beebe, Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts, p.128.
18. - Markson notes many pertinent similarities between Poe's story and Under the Volcano: 'the parallels between the two works are uncanny. Roderick Usher and Poe's narrator, like the Consul and Laruelle, are childhood friends who have come together after long separation; there is a "haunted" palace in the Poe not unlike Maximilian's with its "ghosts" in Lowry; a guitar ... is used as a comparable symbol in both narratives; there is a painting intended to represent hell in each; the occult books named in Poe are virtually interchangeable with those later to be catalogued on the Consul's shelves; Poe's Roderick, in giving up his "soul" echoes themes in Lowry; the "fissure" on the house in Poe corresponds symbolically with the barranca in Quahnahuac; and even the ultimate tragedies in the two stories are hauntingly similar.'  
See David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano, p.29.
19. - With its towers, fecund barranca and twin volcanic peaks, Lowry's terrain could be termed ~~an~~ implicitly 'Freudian'.
20. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.60.
21. - Dale Edmonds, "Mescalusions or The Drinking Man's Under the Volcano", p.283.
22. - See Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, p.300.



23. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.88.
24. - For a full analysis of possible cinematic influences on Laruelle and similarities between Under the Volcano and the films of Eisenstein, see Tony Kilgallin, Lowry (Press Porcupine, Ontario, 1973), pp.130-149.
25. - Maurice Beebe, Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts, p.171.
26. - William Gray, The Talking Tree (York Beach, Maine, 1977), p.270.
27. - Lowry casts much further light on his use of a tower as an appropriate location in which an artistic consciousness can operate in his subsequent novel Dark as the Grave wherein my Friend is Laid. One recalls that Lowry himself stayed in an apartment of 'Jacques's' house on his return to Mexico in 1945. (See Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, pp.313-314); and it was there that he composed his famous letter to Jonathan Cape:

I happen to be living in the very tower which was the original of the house of M. Laruelle, which I had only seen previously from the outside, and that ten years ago, but which is the very place where as it happens the Consul in the Volcano also had a little complication with some delayed correspondence.

(Selected Letters, p.57.)

Aptly, in Chapter Seven of Dark as the Grave, Wilderness reminisces with Eddie Kent about the towered house where he now finds himself. He characterises the house solely in terms of its tower: 'yes, when I said "house" I meant the tower' (p.153), and goes on to say: 'It belonged to an artist and I supposed the bottom part to be a studio since it was glassed in' (ibid.). Later Eddie asks Wilderness if the 'tower gave [him] an inspiration', to which Sigbjorn replies: 'or my imagination fired the tower' (ibid.). (Compare the Consul's 'desire to destroy [himself] by [his] own imagination' (45).) Wilderness also says that he 'made a rather important character ... live in that blasted tower' (p.154): the pun on 'blasted' is also, of course, germane to much of the occult imagery placed on various towers in the Volcano.

A great deal more could be said in relation to the increasingly elaborate role the tower plays in Lowry's later metafictional exercises. See, for example, 'Through the Panama' in Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place, where Lowry describes a 'man sitting up in the control tower high above the topmost lock ... who would feel perfectly comfortable if only he did

not know that there was yet another man sitting yet higher above him in his invisible control tower'(p.61).

Nevertheless these convoluted areas of tower symbolism in Lowry's later fiction are not really the concern of this present study. Suffice to say here then that Laruelle's role in relation to his towers contains, in embryonic form, some of the obsessions with the 'ivory tower' artist figure Lowry proceeds to develop in some of his later work.

28. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.85.
29. - *ibid.*, p.66.
30. - Malcolm Lowry, Dark as the Grave, p.168.
31. - A common practice in some forms of astral projection is to visualise a temple, its mental 'absorption' supposedly bringing about 'inner' harmony.  
See Alan Richardson, An Introduction to the Mystical Qabalah (The Chaucer Press, Wellingborough, Suffolk, 1981), pp.60-61.

CANTINAS

You then demand why I call so loudly on Dionysus.  
I go into my routine.

'Dionysus! Dionysus! I call on the wine-god because his begetting and birth were so different from Janey's, so different from yours, so different from mine. I call on Dionysus in order to explain the tragedy. A tragedy that is not alone Janey's, but one that is the tragedy of all of us.

'Who among us can boast that he was born three times, as was Dionysus? - once from the womb of "hapless Semele", once from the thigh of Zeus, and once from the flames. Or who can say, like Christ that he was born of a virgin? Or who can even claim to have been born as was Gargantua? Alas! none of us. Yet it is necessary for us to compete - as it was necessary for Janey to compete - with Dionysus the thrice born, Christ son of God, Gargantua born 'midst a torrent of tripe at a most memorable party. You hear the thunder, you see the lightning, you smell the forests, you drink wine - and you attempt to be as was Christ, Dionysus, Gargantua!'

West, 'The Dream Life of Balso Snell'.

The cantina can probably be considered as the central venue for the enactment of the drama of Under the Volcano; even locales

which are not ostensibly cantinas as such, for example, the Consul's house, Laruelle's towers, the bus to the arena, are soon transformed into drinking places. On the first page proper of his novel Lowry informs us that Quahnahuac possesses 'fifty-seven cantinas'(9): if we add together the two digits - five and seven - we get twelve, which may suggest, in an oblique way, that various cantinas are to dominate the twelve hours of the narrative's immediate action, and also, of course, by extension, the twelve chapters of the book. Most (if not all) of the cantinas in Under the Volcano, even those just mentioned (or visited) in passing, tend to bear some kind of extraneous meaning apart from their function as a convenient and 'necessary' backdrop - be it ironical, symbolic or 'merely' anticipatory. Moreover, these perverted watering-holes also represent stages on the journey or the descent, gradations or levels similar, in many ways, to the different circles encountered by Dante on his cosmic travels. Employing a different medieval literary comparison, one could say that they are stopping-off places on a kind of inverted Canterbury pilgrimage; and indeed, rather crucial 'tales' of sorts, within the context of Lowry's own narrative progression, also tend to be told there.

Although Lowry's Quahnahuac, indeed his Mexico (if not in fact his world) contains innumerable cantinas, pubs, cafés, ale houses, etc., call them what you will, he is rarely simply interested in chronicling them for their own sake; rather, he concentrates his efforts on providing them with any, and every, possible sort of cross-textual significance. Even rather neutral, barely named 'locales', like those encountered on Yvonne's travels, have their 'strategic' function within the framework of the narrative in

general, for example, the 'Regis Hotel Canada'(72) implicitly contrasts the dingy claustrophobic Mexican cantinas with an idyllic and spacious sumptuousness, thereby reinforcing the 'Canadian dream' which percolates through the novel in other ways. In Acapulco, Yvonne has spent the penultimate evening of her life in the 'Hotel Mirador'(72), 'mirador' meaning 'observation post', and offering still a further variant on the towers which litter the Mexican landscape.<sup>1</sup> Yet another hotel she has visited is the 'Hotel Nazareth Galilee'(72), a venue which, albeit whimsically, corresponds quite well to the Christian parallels and inversions Lowry draws throughout his novel.

As a boy, the Consul would spend his summer holidays with the Taskerson family and his newly-acquired friend Jacques. Although the Taskerson boys were heavy drinkers Geoffrey and Jacques did not indulge in the family's drinking sprees. In fact, Firmin takes the initiative to enter a bar of his own accord only after he and a girlfriend are found by Laruelle in the notorious Hell Bunker; although Firmin orders 'Johnny Walkers all round'(27),<sup>2</sup> the proprietor refuses to serve them on account of the fact that they are still minors. Lowry calls this tavern 'The Case is Altered'(27), a queer name, as Laruelle himself concedes, but one which ultimately casts fascinating light on a number of events in the Consul's last day.<sup>3</sup> The Consul has moved from the Hell Bunker to the first cantina of his life: at the close of the novel he moves from the Farolito, the last cantina of his life, to the abyss - another, if more literal, Hell Bunker. (Mid-way through the text, at Laruelle's, the Consul conceives of the Farolito as a mock club-

house and in the next instant remembers the name of his first tavern: 'the Farolito, the nineteenth hole ... The Case is Altered' (206).) In Chapter One, Laruelle recalls briefly the events immediately succeeding the Consul's murder and wonders why the police were reluctant to detain Hugh 'as a witness, at least in one aspect of what now at a distance one could almost refer to as the "case"' (14);<sup>4</sup> and, indeed, at the end of the Consul's life, the deadly humiliation encountered in 'The Case is Altered' becomes transformed, as the case indeed becomes altered, into a humiliating death at the hands of the Fascist 'brutos'. (By ~~virtu~~ of the basic Spanish/English exercise book the Consul finds at the fairground, Lowry tells us that the Spanish word for 'the house [is] (la casa) (227): in a sense, Laruelle's house (or casa) too is altered to look, both backwards across the 'imaginary golf course' of the text to Chapter One, where we first encounter 'The Case', as well as forwards to Chapter Twelve and the Farolito - that altered 'Case' where the Consul, of course, ends up.

In Chapter One Laruelle and Bustamente have their discussion about the Consul in a

little cantina which abutted on the cinema without sharing its frontal shelter. The cantina, known as the Cervceria XX, and which was also Vigil's 'place where you know', was lit by candles stuck in bottles on the bar and on the few tables long the walls. (31)

'XX', a famous make of Mexican beer, is also, according to Epstein, the number 20 as 'a symbol of fire and regeneration'.<sup>5</sup> The cantina shares many overlapping features with the Farolito, for example,

Bustemente and Laruelle sit at 'the end of the short bar where there was room for two'(31), whilst the Farolito recedes to a 'lightless annex no larger than a cupboard in which two men ... were sitting, drinking or plotting'(348). However, the Farolito (lighthouse) may also be said to represent, for the Consul at least, within the framework of his occult interests, a symbol of fire and regeneration, yet it is also, as are many other places, a highly ambiguous venue: regeneration may be seen to be denied Firmin there, and the fire, if it appears, may be regarded as simply the gunfire which exterminates him before he is thrown down the ravine, and thus become synonymous with the fire of hell. The Consul compares the 'little lighthouse' to a cantina in Oaxaca, 'El Infierno, that other Farolito' (349) which undoubtedly serves to accentuate its infernal aspects. Perhaps significantly, it is in Canto XX of his Inferno that Dante tells of the fate of the sorcerers:

New punishments behoves me sing in this  
Twentieth canto of my canticle  
Which tells of spirits sunk in the Abyss.<sup>6</sup>

Dorothy L. Sayers summarises the canto when she writes:

The primary image of sorcery here is that of the fortune tellers, who, having attempted to usurp God's prerogative by prying into the future, are now so twisted that eyes and feet face in opposite directions. More generally, there is an image of the twisted nature of all magical art, which is a deformation of knowledge, and especially of the psychic powers, to an end outside the unity of the creation in God.<sup>7</sup>

The Consul, as potential sorcerer who has misused his knowledge to incorrect ends, may therefore have his infernal fate once again

obliquely foreshadowed merely by the number which is attached to the cantina in which Laruelle and Bustamente find themselves in Chapter One.

The first bar of the day in which we meet Firmin (as indeed does Yvonne) is the Hotel Bella Vista. Although a rather 'neutral' venue in comparison to some of the more exotic cantinas to be encountered later, the Bella Vista assists in establishing much of the terrain for the 'rich cantina country'(286) of subsequent travels; and, indeed, it is used primarily to foreshadow aspects of many pubs and bars to come, especially the last stopping-off place, the Farolito. As Yvonne enters it, she immediately registers the apparent fact that 'The bar was empty'(50), whilst in Chapter Twelve, Firmin, entering the Farolito, observes that its 'main bar-room ... was deserted'(338). At the Bella Vista we encounter both the gun-running Fascist Weber, as well as the sinister Tarascan woman with the dominoes, two minor characters but ones who both re-emerge twelve hours later at Parian. Moreover, the Consul offers Yvonne a cigarette called 'Alas!'(52) and at the Farolito he again produces an 'Alas; the tragic word droned round the room like a bullet that had passed through him'(347), whilst the refrains of '... "a corpse [being] transported by express!"'(48) and "Absolutamente necesario"'(51) find some kind of actual realisation of sorts twelve hours later as we realise that the police chiefs deem to make it absolutely necessary that the Consul's own corpse be expressly transported down the ravine! 'Per se' the Hotel Bella Vista bar offers little that is interesting or curious (in fact it is probably the most 'normal' bar of the entire narrative - if drinking there at



seven a.m. can be classed as normal) in comparison to the increasingly infernal drinking venues yet to be visited; nonetheless, it already bears, albeit ~~in~~ in a constrained or moderated way, the seeds of destruction which are imminently made to flower.

In his 'Preface to a Novel', which he wrote especially for Clarisse Francoillon's French translation of Under the Volcano, Lowry himself condescends in order to point out the structural importance of two of his cantinas:

The narrative ... begins on All Soul's Day, in November, 1939, in a hotel called Casino de la Selva - selva meaning wood.... The theme of the dark wood, introduced once again in chapter seven when the Consul enters a lugubrious cantina called El Bosque, which also means wood, is resolved in chapter XI, which relates the death of the heroine and in which the wood becomes reality and also fatality. <sup>8</sup>

In his brief analysis Lowry divulges his intention of enlarging the specific Dante-esque context of the dark wood theme in order to assimilate some of his cantinas into the pattern. The relationship which exists between the real forest stretching across the terrain from Quahnahuac to Parian and the two symbolical cantinas - El Bosque and the Casino de la Selva - can also, however, be slightly strengthened with reference to Dante: the feelings of guilt, fear and despair which partially accounts for Firmin's entry into the El Bosque are also features of Dante's persona in Canto I of Inferno; furthermore, both Firmin and Dante could be said to have 'stumbled from the narrow way'.<sup>9</sup> The similarities between the wood and the cantina throughout the narrative become finally enhanced in yet another ingenious manner:

the Consul, spiritually lost, dies just outside a cantina, whilst Yvonne, physically lost, is trampled to death in a dark wood nearby.

Sometimes Lowry's overwhelming obsession with symbolism gives way to a fundamentally ironical approach. For example, mid-way through the 'idyllic' Chapter Four of Under the Volcano, in the midst of a hymn to the affirmative aspects of life, Hugh and Yvonne come across the cantina La Sepultura, whose name serves to remind one of destiny and death. Ingeniously, immediately after sighting La Sepultura, Lowry makes Hugh also see, for the first time, the fateful horse with the number seven branded to it which later that day is to assist in bringing Yvonne to her own sepulchre.

Occasionally, the superficial image suggested by the seemingly innocuous names of some of the cantinas differs sharply from what they really represent in actuality. This irony frequently becomes apparent when the cantinas appear to be drawn in sharp contrast to the way the Consul himself thinks about them. Above all he is attracted to the 'beauty' of the public house which for him, at least, represents a consoling atmosphere of harmony and peace in contrast to the tribulations of the outside world. The sunlight which permeates the windows of a cantina represents some kind of mystical illumination for Firmin:

'you misunderstand me if you think it is altogether darkness I see, and if you insist on thinking so, how can I tell you why I do it? But if you look at that sunlight there, ah, then perhaps you'll get the answer, see, look at the way it falls through the window: what beauty can compare to that of a cantina in the early morning?' (55) <sup>10</sup>

Moreover, Firmin frequently insists on seeing light when he is in fact surrounded by darkness. Admittedly not much remains of the fertile energy of the sunlight once the Consul has entered any respective cantina; nevertheless, it performs an aesthetic function of sorts in highlighting the attractions of the drunkard's love for him. The light which emanates from any respective cantina constitutes, for Firmin, essentially a metaphorical illumination; it presents a further ray of hope in his continual struggle for transcendence.

Essentially, and especially as the day wears on, the morning 'light' with which some of the earlier cantinas are endowed gradually fades away and the bars become grimmer and darker; the El Bosque, for example, entered by Firmin just about half-way through the day is rendered as 'facing east [and thus becoming] progressively darker as the sun ... climbed higher into the sky'(229).<sup>11</sup>

The consistent level of irony which informs many of the cantinas is maintained at the El Amor de los Amores: the name literally means 'love of loves' yet the place itself appears to represent anything but an adequate venue for loving couples; indeed if 'love' is available there it can probably only be bought. It is at the El Amor de los Amores that the pelado boards the bar and also Hugh sees there 'what appeared to be armed policemen drinking at the bar'(236). The pelado robs the dying Indian of his last few coins whilst the armed policemen are the ones who no doubt later draw up in their car marked '"Diplomático"'(249) to deal with the situation. The love which should ideally unite all men is thus deliberately betrayed and degenerates into either

personal greed or political motivation.

Once the bus's passengers reach Tomalin the pelado, the thief who has robbed the dying Indian, enters a cantina called Todos Contentos y Yo También: the name literally means 'Everybody happy, including me' (255), and, indeed, Lowry allows the Consul to translate it for us. Ironically, again though, in view of the predicament, not everyone in the Mexican world of Under the Volcano is happy, especially not the man dying by the wayside. Moreover, the Consul's happiness is also in a way self-delusory and Hugh is made to relativise the precarious and ominous predicament of his half-brother (and, indeed, of Yvonne) when he thinks of the vultures in the sky as 'happy' too - and 'And including those ... who wait only for the ratification of death' (255). Again the name of the cantina serves to contradict the harsh realities of the underlying situation. Dorosz writes that the names of many of the cantinas 'indicate the light of the sun, love, happiness. But the heavenly joys so passionately sought for by the Consul are within the cantinas interfused with hopelessness and disaster'.<sup>12</sup> (I believe Dorosz's analysis of the situation proves pertinent only if we do not take the Consul himself into consideration: the heavenly joys which the Consul seeks in the cantina are, for him at least, present; and as such, the statement that he is happy cited above, for him at least rings true. As T. Bareham remarks, 'the fate of Geoffrey Firmin like that of Everyman is tragic and predetermined, and yet it is comic and voluntary'.<sup>13</sup> As with much else in this most complex of novels the cantinas cannot simply be regarded in a mono-dimensional manner for to do so is to deny them their fundamental ambivalence.)

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# PAGINATION ERROR

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The themes of disaster, death and chaos, etc., which seem to pervade most of the cantinas in one way or other, are again maintained, on a slightly different level, at the Salon Ofelia. Immediately prior to the Consul making his suggestion of 'Forward to the Salon Ofelia' (281), Yvonne's last mental glimpse of the northern Paradise becomes interrupted by the following strange rhetorical question: 'Why was it though, that night in the centre of her brain, there should be a figure of a woman having hysterics, jerking like a puppet and banging her fists upon the ground' (281). There is perhaps little doubt about Lowry's associative intentions in this instant: he is playing 'sortes Shakespeareanae' (40) and providing us with a vision of Ophelia who has gone mad at the impossibility of establishing a lasting and loving relationship with Hamlet - a predicament which in many ways mirrors Yvonne's own condition.<sup>14</sup>

Two more cantinas are frequented in the novel by Hugh and Yvonne; only one more by the Consul. Leaving the Salon behind, the couple take the indirect route to Parian and, firstly, come across the little tavern, the El Petate. Again Lowry makes it foreshadow the now imminent end: it stands near some 'clamorous falls' (319), whilst both Yvonne and Geoffrey are also soon to fall; the cantina is all that is remaining of a 'formerly prosperous village ... which had burned' (320), and again, in a sense, this could be a symbolic correlative for Firmin himself - a formerly prosperous human being, now ex-Consul, virtually ex-human being burnt out by excessive alcohol intake; moreover, it is at the El Petate that Yvonne spots the caged eagle and sets it free, thus metaphorically relinquishing her hold on Geoffrey. Secondly, just as the first peals of thunder ring through the air and the mourners at the

cemetery can be heard wailing their lamentations, Hugh and Yvonne stumble across the Hotel y Restaurant El Popo.<sup>15</sup> Lowry places the cantina both near to the actual border of the ravine as well as giving it a certain 'waiting character that pertains to a border'(325): indeed, for the Consul and Yvonne the 'border' of death is also now precariously near. Hugh hears a radio, 'an abysmal mechanic force out of control that was running itself to death, was breaking up, was hurtling into dreadful trouble'(325), and it again must serve as yet another symbolic correlative for the Consul.<sup>16</sup> Yet more foreshadowing takes place when Hugh says that the beer 'tastes like gun-metal'(326), whilst the sound of gun fire is too soon to be heard.

At the El Popo both Hugh and Yvonne also drink mescal , 'to find out what Geoffrey sees in it'(326). This action, though seemingly harmless in itself, more or less brings about the end of their search for Geoffrey, for, exhausted, and now intoxicated, they are without the energy necessary for a speedy pursuit. Hugh spends some time on more pseudo-political philosophising, and buys a guitar from some hombre with whom he also has a tequila; Yvonne has some final thoughts about her Canadian paradise before the potent mescal is made to metaphorically set fire to her vision. At the El Popo, the final cantina visited by Hugh and Yvonne on the Day of the Dead, they finally succumb to, and are enticed by, the Consul's life style and 'raison d'etre'.

It is the Farolito, of course, which Lowry and the Consul have designated as the ultimate destination of the death pilgrimage;

the final cantina to which the final sign-post points the way (no matter which of the two routes one takes). Ironically, in terms of the chaos and mayhem which seems present there, the Farolito neatly fits into the ordered design and craftsmanship of the novel itself by reflecting aspects of many of the other cantinas encountered on the way there. Like the Puerto de Sol it offers the 'promise of lightness' and the 'certainty of brightness' (129) in that, as mentioned elsewhere, its name means 'little lighthouse'; nevertheless, things are far from 'bright' within its dingy interior, as the Consul discovers when he gets there. Bareham notes that "farol" in Spanish can also mean delusory or misleading, and one suspects Lowry is aware of the overlapping implications both of life and death, of hope and despair in this pole-star of the Consul's journey'.<sup>17</sup> Earlier in the day, at Laruelle's, Firmin had asked himself: 'Could one be faithful to Yvonne and the Farolito both?' (205) also implicitly polarising the two and placing them at opposite ends (as for Geoffrey they are) of the same spectrum. In the Lowryian 'Weltanschauung' the light of hope and the 'light' of darkness, in many respects, co-exist side by side. The Consul's problem consists of his incapability of accepting both sides of the coin at the same time. He could have remained faithful to both Yvonne and the Farolito by simply taking her there; admittedly, not all problems would have been solved, but both their unnecessary deaths would have been averted.

Yet Firmin chooses the bleak isolation of the little lighthouse, once more taking his 'sorrow into the shadow of old monasteries, [his] guilt into cloisters and under tapestries, and into the misericordes of unimaginable cantinas' (41). The Farolito

is certainly the true apotheosis of Geoffrey's alcoholic's progress: dark and gloomy, erected virtually under the volcano which virtually threatens to fall upon it, and bordering on the very edge of Moloch's mouth - the precipitous and engulfing barranca. In the Farolito all human values are also perverted or turned upside down: friendly human approaches and common courtesy become eclipsed by overtly hostile attacks and silence; apocalyptic visions of death impose themselves on the Consul's mind; love is reduced to bestial sexual impulses; reason and justice are forgotten; 'acquaintances', who have at one stage or other at least tolerated the Consul's company, now turn their back on Geoffrey and even assist in bringing about his downfall. The Farolito represents the last 'hell-hole' of the Consul's cantina-obsessed life. Nevertheless, still, as Lowry himself was eager to announce:

There still remain passages of humor in this chapter and they are necessary because after all we are expected to believe and not believe and then again to believe: the humor is a kind of bridge between the naturalistic and the transcendental and then back to the naturalistic again, though that humor I feel always remains true to the special reality created by the chapter itself. <sup>18</sup>

As Lowry himself concedes, although the Farolito is a frightening and 'hellish' venue, humour and comedy are also to be found there; comedy, in Lowry's encyclopedic spectrum, ranging from 'low' to 'divine'. Kilgallon perceives similarities between the Farolito chapter of Under the Volcano and the 'Circe' or 'Night-Town' chapter of Ulysses when he writes:

Though Joyce was never a major influence on Lowry, the analogy is a revealing one, for independently each author utilized the Homeric myth of Circe as integrating metaphor. Both chapters are seen at night, midnight in Dublin, the 'twelfth' hour in Parian; Joyce's scene, a brothel, and Lowry's, a cantina-cum-brothel, are both symbolized by a whore, Bella and Maria respectively. 19

Kilgallin's comparison is relevant and illuminating, especially since both Joyce and Lowry perhaps appear to attempt to render metaphorically the effects of extreme drunkenness on their protagonists by making the venues where we find them simultaneously threatening and comic. The 'Circe' chapter of Ulysses is also sometimes known as the 'Walpurgisnacht' chapter, so named after the debauched and phantasmogorical scene in Goethe's Faust: in the Volcano, as mentioned elsewhere, some of the actions in the Farolito resemble the celebrations of a witches' sabbat, four of which traditionally take place during the course of the year, one on the even of May 1st - 'Walpurgisnacht'; moreover, at the Farolito, the Consul could be said to be at his most 'Faustian' - the Consul thinks that the little room in the centre of the Farolito 'at first sight ... was a student's room' (349), and it reminds him of his room at college, whilst it may also serve to remind us of the dark student's room in which we find Faust at the beginning of Goethe's drama. (It is uncanny that Firmin 'sells his soul' to a diseased whore, just as Adrian Leverkühn does in Mann's exactly contemporary reworking of the Faust myth.)

In this brief analysis of some aspects of some of the cantinas encountered in Under the Volcano, I have perhaps not been able to posit the cantinas as a fully-fledged system of order in

their own right; the reason for this would seem to be because, actively impinging on most of the narrative as they do, they also succeed in actively impinging on a multiplicity of its threads; and thus, their overall function tends to become diffused. Ultimately, the cantinas perform their role as symbols in Under the Volcano, though precisely what they symbolise by no means remains consistent throughout, in that they emanate a series of interconnected ramifications which gradually, as is the case with much of Lowry's material, assume an autonomous sub-structure of their own; as T. Bareham writes: 'The purpose of the symbols in his [Lowry's] nearly-factual fiction is to give an artistic coherence to ... correspondences, to work a literary exorcism against the randomness of life as he saw it'.<sup>20</sup>

CANTINAS - NOTES

1. - In Acapulco, the Hotel Mirador is the one which directly overlooks the famous high-diving spot where divers leap some 150 feet into a tiny, rocky inlet. In a sense, on the Day of the Dead 1938, Yvonne too is given a prime view of Geoffrey 'diving' to his death.
2. - The word 'round' in this context probably puns on the golfing connection.
3. - In point of fact in the whole of Great Britain there is only one public house called 'The Case is Altered' as I discovered when I visited it. It is situated roughly half-way between Warwick and Birmingham and derives its name by virtue of the fact that in the eighteenth century it was purely an ale-house called 'The Case'; applying for a spirit licence the landlord was told that the premises were too small and so the 'Case' had to be altered and expanded before the due licence was granted. Whether Lowry actually visited the pub at any time is open to dispute, although he did 'during the Christmas vacations of 1930, 31 and 32 ... stay with the Cases [his friend Martin Case's family] in their large Victorian house in Edgbaston, a suburb of Birmingham' (see Douglas Day, Malcolm Lowry: A Biography, p.130). Indeed Martin Case, knowing Lowry's penchant for word-play, may have introduced him to 'The Case': similarly, Lowry himself may, in his novel, have repaid the compliment, as it were, by altering the Case family into the Taskersons and, in effect, 'revealing' this intention in the name he chooses for his tavern.
4. - That Lowry toys irreverently with the notion that the Consul's death constituted a murder case is demonstrated at various points in the novel, for example, in the Farolito, the Consul remembers a barman he once encountered and then thinks (referring to himself in the third person): 'and why has he told him where he lives, now the police will be able to find out - and why is the barman's name Sherlock?' (345)
5. - Perle S. Epstein, The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry: Under the Volcano and the Cabbala (New York, 1969), p.68.
6. - Dante, The Divine Comedy: Hell, Canto XX, ll.1-3, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers, (Harmondsworth, 1972), p.195.
7. - *ibid.*, pp.198-99.
8. - The edition of Under the Volcano in which the preface appeared was published by Corréa and the Club Français du Livre in 1949 and reprinted by Corréa in 1960, p.11.
9. - Dante, The Divine Comedy 1: Hell Canto 1, l.12, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers, p.71.



10. - Whether these are in fact the Consul's words remains ambiguous: the lengthy passage from which the extract is taken begins as follows: "But look here, hang it all, it is not altogether darkness," the Consul seemed [*my italics*] to be saying in reply to her'(55).
11. - The notion that the gloomier and darker a cantina becomes, the more enlightening it appears for the Consul is perhaps interestingly demonstrated in this quotation, for the El Bosque, 'facing east', already looks to the transcendentalism practised in the Orient. In his letter to Yvonne the Consul imagines himself and her facing 'east, like Swedenborg's angels'(42).
12. - Kristofer Dorosz, Malcolm Lowry's Infernal Paradise (Uppsala, 1976), p.57.
13. - T. Bareham, 'Paradigms of Hell: Symbolic Patterning in Under the Volcano', in On the Novel, edited by B.S. Benedikz (London, 1971), p.119.
14. - Also at the Salon Ofelia, the Consul, perusing his second glass of mescol, thinks 'To drink or not to drink'(289), the lethal mescol, in a sense, contributing to his suicide. Earlier in Chapter Ten, during his day-dream, the Consul had recalled a 'cemetery' and its 'gravedigger'(285) - perhaps another sly reference to Hamlet?
15. - The procession, emanating a 'ghostly tintinnabulation'(324) and 'visible only as ... candle flames'(324) directly parallels Laruelle's encounter of mourners in Chapter One 'visible only as the melancholy lights of their candles, circling [*my italics*] among the distant trussed cornstalks'(10). The procession in Chapter One also emits a 'Tintinnabulation ... as of singing, rising and falling, and a steady tramping'(10) - at the close of the narrative Hugh is to be found singing, the Consul imagines himself both rising and falling, and Yvonne is 'steadily' trampled by the white horse.
16. - The Consul, like the radio, 'an abysmal mechanic force out of control', could also, like the wireless, be said to become a sort of literal 'infernal machine'. Certainly, Lowry's employment of the radio correlative openly reinforces his claim that Under the Volcano 'can even be regarded as a sort of machine: it works too'. See Selected Letters (London, 1967), p.66.
17. - T. Bareham, 'Paradigms of Hell: Symbolic Patterning in Under the Volcano', in On the Novel, p.121.
18. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.85.
19. - Tony Kilgallin, Lowry (Erin, Ontario, 1973), p.199.
20. - T. Bareham, 'Paradigms of Hell: Symbolic Patterning in Under the Volcano', in On the Novel, p.116.

WHEELS. CIRCLES. CYCLES

Riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve  
of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a  
commodious vicus of recirculation back to  
Howth Castle and Environs.

Joyce, Finnegans Wake

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symbol's inherent relationship to the book's overall structure. Initially, discussing the Ferris Wheel, and more particularly, its specific employment in Chapter One, Lowry is soon eager to elaborate on his symbol's broader implications:

The wheel is of course the Ferris wheel in the square, but it is, if you like, also many other things: it is Buddha's wheel of the law, it is eternity, it is the instrument of eternal recurrence, the eternal return, and it is the form of the book; or superficially it can be seen simply in an obvious movie sense as the wheel of time whirling backwards until we have reached the year before and Chapter Two. <sup>1</sup>

Lowry's own enthusiastic description of the numerous roles he assigns to his wheel again highlights for us the overtly ambiguous response necessary in order to come to terms with one of Under the Volcano's key symbols: on a primary level the wheel (the Ferris Wheel) Lowry employs to draw Chapter One to a close is endowed with a specific, or, as he says, 'obvious' function as 'the wheel of time whirling backwards'; yet, on a secondary level, it must again be regarded as simply another example of a symbol qua symbol, one awakening associative links and patterns with the text's many other wheels and associated wheel imagery and jargon; and thus, by extension, and in the terms of the author's own explication, with infinitely more ethereal notions such as 'eternity', 'eternal recurrence', 'eternal return', or even 'the form of the book'. Even if we were deprived of Lowry's letter to Cape a close reading of the Volcano would suggest, simply by the proliferation of its appearances, that the wheel's function within the novel is both manifold and complex. Many important events, turning-points one

might say, especially in the second half of the book, are 'surrounded' by wheel or cyclical imagery: in Chapter Seven the Consul visits the fairground where he not only explores the layout of the Ferris Wheel and the many other merry-go-rounds but also takes a ride himself on the looping-the-loop machine; in Chapter Eight the movement of the bus towards Tomalin is frequently charted, both in terms of its spinning wheels as well as by the descriptions of the 'rolling' countryside through which it passes, and which its movement partially creates; in Chapter Nine an aura of fateful entrapment becomes suggested by the circular bull-ring on which the three protagonists focus their attention, and which Hugh actually enters, where the animal is gradually tortured and humiliated. The wheel's centrality in relation to the narrative is thus proclaimed on an 'immediate level', to once again employ Dale Edmonds' invaluable term, by its actual appearance, albeit ~~in~~ in varying guises, within the context of the plot or 'story'. (The penetrating spectrum of interest occupied by many of Lowry's symbols becomes achieved by ~~virtue~~ of his active incorporation of them on a dynamic plane in which they directly interact with, or impinge on, his protagonists.) Once such a symbiotic relationship has been observed, one that is which pays due attention to the individual circumstances, on a surface level, of Lowry's method of symbolic incorporation, then it becomes possible to isolate or detach the wheel from its surrounds, play it off against itself, thus examining its roles in intersecting the text, assisting in breaking down temporal or chronological linearity, helping to establish what Victor Doyen has called the novel's 'spatial' form.<sup>2</sup>

In my chapter on Myth, I suggested how Lowry's use of certain mythic archetypes lent much of the narrative a 'timeless' quality in that he constantly resorted to central allusions fixed in the collective consciousness of mankind at large through their varied, yet consistent, employment.<sup>3</sup> On a different note, David Markson, discussing his own thorough chronological analysis of the novel, writes that such a method of 'line of attack has its own pitfalls, since a number of first interpretations will undoubtedly appear conjectural until [later] evidence ... verif[ies] Lowry's intent; yet while some few anticipations will be unavoidable, but its inherently "spatial" nature the mythic novel can define its terms only gradually, and that process itself seems worth exploring'.<sup>4</sup> The 'timeless' and 'spatial' qualities of the wheel symbol in Under the Volcano would therefore appear to have some correlation or overlap with its basic mythic structure. Such a potential and necessary synthesis of his two ordering systems is reinforced by Lowry when he overtly percolates the timeless and the spatial aspects of his mythic employment through to his use of the wheel itself and alludes to the Greek archetypes of Ixion and Sisyphus, as well as to the fate of St. Catherine. In such an acute juxtapositional manner what was possibly only a by-product of one ordering system (the spatial organisation of myth in the novel) becomes fundamental in highlighting a vital attribute of another ordering system (the wheel and its relationship to the form of the book itself).

Ixion makes an appearance at the centre of the novel, minutes before the Consul takes his ride on the Infernal Machine,

when Laruelle links him with Prometheus: 'Je crois que le vautour est doux à Prométhée plus que les Ixion se plaisent en Enfer'(222).<sup>5</sup>

Richard Barber briefly describes the predicament of Ixion as follows:

A Greek ruler who murdered his father-in-law in a pot of red-hot coals. Only Zeus could purify him, but Ixion repaid him by trying to make love to Zeus' wife Hera.... the children of Ixion and Nephele [his wife] were the centaurs. Ixion was punished for his crimes by being bound to a burning wheel which turns forever in Tartarus.<sup>6</sup>

Ixion's fate was thus brought about by his sins in the past: the Consul has, of course, not murdered his father-in-law, nevertheless, he did (possibly) consign German submarine officers to the furnaces of the s.s. Samaritan during an incident in the First World War.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Lowry perhaps also wishes to imply that it is not merely Geoffrey himself who carries the brunt of the Ixion comparisons - the latter's adultery with Hera relates implicitly to the novel's two other male protagonists (Hugh and Laruelle) and their adultery with Yvonne. (In such a way Laruelle's supercilious attitude to the Consul, reinforced by the tone of his French Ixion comparison, proves highly ironical; and Firmin's imminent Ixionic fate on the Infernal Machine is unconsciously echoed a year later by the Frenchman himself - not only is he confronted by 'The Ferris wheel ... silently burning [my italics] high on the hill'(21), he also seems unwilling, or unable, to leave Quahnahuac and thinks that he 'could go on travelling in an eccentric orbit round his house forever [my italics]'(29).) The centaurs as children of Ixion are perhaps also thematically

significant to some of the Volcano's undercurrents. Horses were introduced into Mexico by the conquistadors and the natives believed that man and horse were one beast. On one of the Rivera murals the horses are depicted as trampling over the native Indians; and, in a sense, Yvonne's 'fate' suggests that the white man is finally given his just deserts. The 'cyclicality ... involved in the Conquest motif',<sup>8</sup> as Walker phrases it, is thus ingeniously connected with the Ixion story and reinforced by the logical denouement of the narrative itself. On one level Lowry achieves his eternal return, yet on another level he also achieves a sense of 'eternity' itself which becomes connected perhaps to what could be termed the 'lessons of history' (see below), other themes which are also intrinsically embedded in the heart of much of his material.

Sisyphus' punishment consisted of 'rolling a great stone up a hill in Tartarus; every time he was about to reach the top, it rolled back to the bottom again'.<sup>9</sup> At the fairground the Consul encounters

A madman ... wearing, in the manner of a life-belt, an old bicycle tyre. With a nervous movement he continually shifted the injured tread round his neck. He muttered to the Consul, but waiting neither for reply or reward, took off the tyre and flung it far ahead of him towards a booth, then followed unsteadily, stuffing something in his mouth from a tin bait jar. Picking up the tyre he flung it far ahead again, repeating this process, to the irreducible logic of which he appeared eternally committed, until out of sight. (227)

The madman's eternal activity is no doubt meant to relate to the Sisyphean predicament of the Volcano's protagonists. Moreover, Lowry's final epiphany for the novel - 'Whoever unceasingly



strives upward ... him can we save' (7) perhaps suggests, in such a context, that upward striving will have no lasting effect; when one is about to approach the summit of any respective incline the stone (or burden) will inexorably prove too great and one will have to begin the whole effort once again.<sup>10</sup> (In a sense Dante's journey through Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso has an implied identical cyclical structure; at the end of the work he finds himself back in the dark wood; and similarly, just before his death, the Consul too imagines himself 'falling, into a forest'(376).) Towards the close of Chapter Nine, Lowry writes that the shadows of his three protagonists 'crawled before them in the dust, slid down white thirsty walls of houses, were caught violently for a moment in an elliptical shade, the turning wrenched wheel of a boy's bicycle' (281). In one sense Lowry here perhaps wishes to suggest the fateful conclusion to the day's events which awaits them (talking to Yvonne in his unsent letter the Consul had already spoken of the 'shadows of their fate'(45)) yet he also possibly alludes once again to the myth of Sisyphus, in that the wheel of the boy's bicycle may serve to remind us of the madman's tyre. Although the characters are, in this instance, moving from the Arena to the Salon Ofelia, their progress is illusory and they have not transcended the unpleasant event of the dying Indian by the roadside which they were 'condemned' to witness. They also notice: 'Bent double, groaning with the weight, an old lame Indian was carrying on his back, by means of a strap looped over his forehead, another poor Indian, yet older and more decrepit than himself. He carried the older man and his crutches, trembling in every limb under this weight of the past, he carried both their burdens'(281). The characters have side-stepped acting as

Samaritans to the dying Indian and 'carrying' him to safety; likewise, they are uninvolved with the plight of the old lame Indian; nonetheless, they too must bear their own respective Sisyphean burdens, their 'weights of the past', and cannot shirk them off.<sup>11</sup> (Another minor 'Sisyphean' character is encountered briefly towards the end of Chapter Six;

A peon loped after her [the woman with the goats] down the hill balancing a large barrel of ice-cream on his head and calling apparently for customers, with what hope of success one could not imagine, since he seemed so burdened as to be unable either to look from side to side or to halt. (193)

And indeed the protagonists too, especially the Consul, also seem so burdened by their destinies that they are unable to 'halt'.)

The eternal plight of Sisyphus, as well as that of Ixion, permeates much of the contextual incident of Under the Volcano even on slighter levels than the above examples demonstrate, for instance, Hugh recalls the chore of having to constantly 'make the rounds of the music publishers' (159-60) trying to sell them some of his songs. The two mythic analogues are, moreover, pertinent to the form of the book itself which is overtly cyclical. By inviting constant re-reading of his novel, Lowry implicitly underlines the fact that his characters are caught in a self-perpetuating fictional process from which (obviously) they can never escape. In a way the reader himself is perhaps also given a Sisyphean burden if he attempts to 'understand' the novel fully, Lowry writing in his letter to Cape that 'the book

was so designed, counterdesigned and interwelded that it could be read an indefinite number of times and still not have yielded all its meanings or its drama or its poetry'.<sup>12</sup> (The novel's cyclical structure, demanding the constant and dedicated re-involvement of the reader, perhaps gives it something in common with Joyce's Finnegans Wake.)<sup>13</sup>

It may be worth noting here that apart from Ixion and Sisyphus two other inhabitants of Tartarus are perhaps also invoked by Lowry. Firstly, Tantalus who 'lives in eternal fear because a rock is balanced precariously above his head, about to crush him'.<sup>14</sup> At the Farolito the Consul stares into the abyss and sees a 'crag that couldn't make up its mind to crumble absolutely, it clung so, cleft, to life. The sheer height was terrifying, he thought, leaning outwards, looking sideways at the split rock and attempting to recall the passage in The Cenoi that described the huge stack clinging to the mass of earth'(339).<sup>15</sup> For the Consul a metaphorical rock of doom also appears constantly poised above his head; moreover, Lowry's placement of the rock within close proximity to the barranca suggests that the latter too, like the rock, could split open at any moment and engulf him. Secondly, Tityus 'chained in Tartarus, where vultures peck eternally at his liver'.<sup>16</sup> Frequently, throughout Under the Volcano, Lowry describes 'vultures-xopilotes, who wait only for the ratification of death'(255) and whose reflections 'a mile deep wheeled [*my italics*] upside down and were gone'(155). Furthermore, perhaps we are meant to speculate that the Consul's excessive alcoholic intake is perhaps not doing his liver much good and, therefore, in such a mythic context as the one underlined, acts in the role of a demonic vulture.

Lowry attended St. Catharine's College, Cambridge, which in terms of his later wheel obsessions could be labelled another one of those strange coincidences which were to fascinate him so much.<sup>17</sup> St. Catherine offers the third 'mythic' archetype to undergo strategic manipulation in the process of establishing a timeless or collective foundation on which many of the symbolic aspects of Lowry's wheel references become built. Donald Attwater says: 'An attempt was made to break her on a spiked wheel (the "catherine-wheel"), but it fell to pieces and she was unhurt, while some of the spectators were filled by flying splinters.... Her body was carried ("by angels") to Mount Sinai'.<sup>18</sup> In Chapter Six, Hugh nostalgically reminisces 'clutching the wheel of St. Catherine feel[ing], for a moment asleep, like Melville, the world hurling from all havens astern' (179-80) which may relate to the splintering of the martyr's wheel whilst a still centre (Catherine remaining unhurt) within the individual dominates. B.W. Martin notes that Circadian rhythms are:

Regular rhythms of biological or physiological activity and function which occur approximately (circa) once each day (diem). The most obvious of these is, of course, sleep but there are many more such as regular fluctuations in blood pressure, in urine production, and so on, which follow a regular repeated cycle over a period of approximately twenty-four hours. Such a rhythm or group of rhythms is often referred to popularly as a biological clock.<sup>19</sup>

St. Catherine's escape from the wheel on which she was tied may have some significance in the way in which the Consul himself, it could be argued, remains unscathed at the ongoing prospect of his own collapse whilst some of the 'spectators' of his demise (Yvonne)

are killed by the 'splinters' which his whirling downfall generates. The opening lines of Cocteau's La Machine Infernale may also be of relevance to such a reading: ' "Spectator, this machine you see here wound up to the full in such a way that the spring will slowly unwind the whole length of a human life, is one of the most perfect constructed by the infernal gods for the mathematical destruction of a mortal" ',<sup>20</sup> Cocteau's desire to involve the spectator as an integral part, or cog, of his machine parallels Lowry's method whereby he suggests that the wheel of fate is not solely of relevance to the Consul's condition but also to his other protagonists, and, by extension, to mankind at large. Admittedly, unlike St. Catherine, the Consul and Yvonne are killed yet both their deaths also take on a kind of martyrdom: Catherine's body carried upwards to Mount Sinai is perhaps alluded to in, both Yvonne's feeling of finding herself 'suddenly gathered upwards and borne towards the stars'(337), and in the Consul's notion that 'strong hands lifted him'(375) towards the summit of the volcano. In one sense, death alleviates them from the ongoing wheel of life. Kristofer Doross remarks that 'the Buddhist wheel also suggests a release from the painful cycle of rebirths into Nirvana, but only in as far as it suggests an escape from the rotating rim to the still centre of the wheel, the realm of the Aristotelian "unmoved mover".'<sup>21</sup> Again Lowry has synthesised two different areas of world myth - Catherine's god-given refuge at the centre of the wheel on which she was tortured parallels the Buddhist release from the painful cycle of life's traumas and tribulations; such spiritual freedom becomes achieved for the characters of Under the Volcano only in death. (The Consul's mystical awareness perhaps dictates that he attempts to seek a Nirvanic release in life yet

this seems impossible; his escape route through alcohol largely proves transitory and, in the long run, merely accentuates the rapidity of his downfall.)<sup>22</sup>

Lowry's acute and complex series of mythical undercurrents have, both contextually and formally, imbued his wheel imagery with connotations of eternity and timelessness. G.P.Jones writes that:

The image of the circle is fundamental to Lowry's thoughts on time. Resorting to as an alternative to the linearity of Newtonian time, the circle of time may suggest dispiriting repetition ... or inspiring continuity ... In either case, because the circle has no beginning and no end, the metaphor leads naturally into reflections on time and eternity.<sup>23</sup>

Reflections on time and eternity are a major concern of Lowry's; his remorseless incorporation of wheel and circle imagery throughout Under the Volcano highlights this fascination in a number of different ways. Obviously, as Laura E. Casari remarks, 'The circularity of structure gives to the novel a sense of timelessness, stating that what has happened may continue to happen',<sup>24</sup> yet it is not merely the novel's overtly cyclical form which is made to carry the brunt of its eternal or timeless themes. Very often the minutiae of the Volcano also contain many of its most pertinent concepts or ideas and this is also the case with the aura or sense of eternity which so frequently permeates the text, though by no means always on its most immediate level. For example, reading aloud the aptly named newspaper El Universal to Hugh, the Consul says that 'Eggs have been in a tree at Klamant Falls for a hundred years, lumberjacks

estimate by rings of wood'(184). In this instance the reference to the rings on the tree may take us back to the 'massive shining depths of [the] ancient fresno trees'(49), an image Yvonne had conjured up as she arrived in Quahnahuac; moreover, the juxtaposition of eggs and falls perhaps implicitly relates once again to the recurring pattern of death and re-birth which the narrative charts, and which its structure reinforces.

Eternity becomes a key concern of the novel especially towards its conclusion when Lowry frequently alludes to the gyration of planets spinning in their orbits around [the] sun: 'And the earth itself still turning on its axis and revolving around [the] sun, the sun revolving around the luminous wheel of [the] galaxy, the countless unmeasured galaxies turning, turning, majestically, into infinity, into eternity'(323). The notion of the 'eternal' as in a way 'emanating' directly from the stars and heavens possibly identifies Lowry's world view with Dante's in relation to the positioning of 'a divine force' as the logical answer to Lowry's rhetorical question: 'what force drives this sublime celestial machinery?'(323) George Holmes writes that above Dante's nine rotating heavens 'is the Empyrean, which does not move. Dante's Empyrean is the Christian heaven, but it is also the soul of the world, formed in the divine mind, the source of influences which radiate throughout the universe'.<sup>25</sup> Yvonne feels that the stars 'diamonded brightness [would] gleam an instant on the soul, touching all within that in memory was sweet or noble or courageous or proud' (323). Moreover, Lowry's notion that the heavens constitute a 'pure geometry'(322), and his apparent desire to depict heavenly bodies as

moving in predetermined circles 'around' the earth, also possibly tells us that he is at least toying with, if not overtly positing, a sort of medieval cosmology.

Throughout Under the Volcano the individual movements of the protagonists are closely referenced to larger wheeling gyrations, in particular that of the earth itself. Ostensibly, the novel's action takes place between the hours of dawn and sunset, between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.; or, conveniently, in terms of Lowry's cyclical obsessions, during a precise revolution of the clock face; yet this is only partially the case, in that the early pages of Chapter Two chronicle, simultaneous to her reunion with Geoffrey, Yvonne's pre-seven o'clock flight to Quahnahuac from Acapulco. In such an elliptical manner the narrative proper thus begins twice (just as it will in effect end twice with the respective fates of the Consul and Yvonne). What the Consul will later term the 'wheels within wheels' (177) is thus immediately suggested in Lowry's method. As she stands in Quahnahuac's square, Yvonne recalls the scene in Acapulco even earlier on that same morning: 'the long dawn rollers advancing, rising, and crashing down to glide, sinking in colourless ellipses over the sand, while early pelicans hunting turned and dived, dived and turned and dived again into the spume, moving with the precision of planets' (50). It is here then, by the sea in Acapulco, that Lowry's long day's journey into night begins. The 'rollers' and 'ellipses' announce that the wheel has been set in motion; the phrase 'turned and dived, dived and turned', in itself 'elliptical', suggests an ongoing and never-ending cyclicity.<sup>26</sup> Just as Yvonne is given the first recorded time sequence of the Day of the Dead, i.e. pre-seven a.m., so she is



also given the last, her death occurring slightly after the Consul's, i.e. just after seven p.m.; and, as she dies, 'the long dawn rollers advancing, rising, and crashing down to glide in colourless ellipses over the sand' (336) come back to her. On one level the wheel has come full circle, the progression from dawn to dusk charted. Within the unwinding of a single day, a lifetime from birth (sunrise) to death (sunset) has been symbolised. On another level the fact that towards the end of his novel Lowry chooses to repeat (verbatim) the words he had employed some 280 pages earlier, in a sense, suggests that death, within the context of the fictional world of Under the Volcano at least, is not a terminus - a new dawn of sorts is constantly heralded, and with it the open invitation to re-read the text. (Earlier I suggested that death was the only way in which the characters of the Volcano could transcend or defy the omnipresent wheel on which they were caught (or in which they were trapped) yet such a reading only applies if we regard the novel as a linear narrative. By contradicting or defying the traditional framework of fictional conventions, Lowry implies, by the cyclical form which his novel assumes, that there will always be a return to the beginning, and, as such, no escape from the ever-revolving wheel.) In such a context the final plea to Yvonne in the Consul's letter, 'come back to me, hear me, it is a cry, come back to me Yvonne, if only for a day...' (46) ironically underlines the implied 'return' to the day when Yvonne does come back which the cyclical structure of Under the Volcano 'forever' underlines. (By choosing to set his novel on the Mexican Day of the Dead, when the dead live again and are said to commune with the living, Lowry also ingeniously defies the notion that death marks a natural terminus to life.)

Northrop Frye, in his ingenious assimilation of mythical to cyclical patterns, and their relevance to the eternally unchanging notes:

The fire-world of heavenly bodies presents us with three important cyclical rhythms. Most obvious is the daily journey of the sun-god across the sky, often thought of as guiding a boat or chariot, followed by a mysterious passage through a dark underworld, sometimes conceived as the belly of a devouring monster, back to the starting point. The Solstitial cycle of the solar year supplies an extension of the same symbolism, incorporated in our Christmas literature. Here there is more emphasis on the theme of a newborn light threatened by the powers of darkness. The lunar cycle has been on the whole of less importance to Western poetry in historic times, whatever its prehistoric role. But its crucial sequence of old moon, "interlunar cave", and new moon may be the source, as it is clearly a close analogy, of the three-day rhythm of death, disappearance, and resurrection which we have in our Easter symbolism.<sup>27</sup>

I have quoted Frye at length in that his three important cyclical rhythms would appear integral to a great many of Lowry's own cyclical interests. The sun's journey across the sky provides the simple chronological framework for the novel's time-span from dawn to dusk: as she flies into Quahnahuac Yvonne observes the sudden 'terrific onslaught of sunlight while the earth turned yet in shadow, a river flashing, a gorge winding darkly beneath, the volcances abruptly wheeling into view from the glowing east'(50), whilst at sunset, during the storm, the recently shot Consul 'reeling saw above him for a moment the shape of Popocatepetl, plumed with emerald snow'(373). The solstitial cycle of the solar year provides yet another cyclical framework for the novel, its first chapter occurring precisely a year to the day later than the remainder of the book and acting in the role of both prologue and epilogue. Finally,

a lunar cycle of sorts is also alluded to, especially in Chapter Eleven where the astronomically minded Yvonne notices that the 'low leaning horn of moon, their pale companion of the morning was setting finally'(323) and, a little later, still dreaming of her northern Paradise, envisages 'the waning moon rising over the water'(327). Moreover, the moon's relationship to the movement of the tides does also not escape Lowry and frequently his omnipresent sea metaphor also carries with it innumerable cyclical overtones, as in the Consul's letter when Firmin imagines himself and Yvonne looking at 'the wash of another unseen ship, like a great wheel, the vast spokes of the wheel whirling across the bay'(43), or when he renders 'Eddies of green and orange birds scattered aloft with ever wider circlings like rings on water'(317).<sup>28</sup> Frye's analogies of cyclic patterns relating to 'Christmas literature' and 'Easter symbolism' are perhaps also embedded in some of the recurrent patterns of Under the Volcano. In his letter, the Consul laments that Yvonne had not written to him for over a year that she had waited 'till after Christmas - Christmas! - and the New Year'(44); in Chapter Four, Hugh conceives of symbolically rendered 'storm clouds gathering' (the action of the novel takes place, of course, in November) and immediately afterwards of a 'mysterious island in the Arabian Sea, where the frankincense and myrrh used to come from'(128); upon leaving the Infernal Machine the Consul finds an exercise book which tells the story of Scrooge. Easter symbolism is, of course, also prevalent: the Consul assumes the role of Christ; he becomes metaphorically crucified; references to 'Golgotha'(206) occur frequently; his garden takes on the guise of Gethsemane, etc.<sup>29</sup>

Frye also notes that 'The vegetable world supplies us of course with the annual cycle of seasons, often identified with or represented by a divine figure which dies in the autumn or is killed with the gathering of the harvest and the vintage'.<sup>30</sup> New observes the Mexican Day of the Dead is an 'annual November celebration ... which stemmed from a pagan concept of the dead as gods of fertility'.<sup>31</sup> The Consul's own death perhaps also takes on something of the role of a harvest sacrifice and it is, of course, presided over by the aptly-named Chief of Gardens. In Chapter One, Laruelle observes mourners 'circling among the distant trussed cornstalks'(10), and, as he walks home, passes 'An abandoned plough, silhouetted against the sky'(15); furthermore, he drinks from a bottle of anis on which 'a florid demon brandished a pitchfork'(10). (The bottle's identical label, with 'pitchfork'(338), is also noticed by the Consul in Chapter Twelve.) As they progress towards Parian, Hugh and Yvonne also pass 'worn-out ploughshares'(318), whilst the very last word of Chapter Eleven is 'Pleides'(337), the group of seven stars whose setting in November [marks] the beginning of ploughing'.<sup>32</sup> In such ways Lowry deliberately draws analogies between the Consul's own autumnal death and the cosmic pattern of growth and subsequent harvest followed by re-birth the following spring. Admittedly, the Consul himself is not re-born yet such a general structure may have been in Lowry's mind in terms of his projected trilogy of novels which he initially termed 'The Modern Divine Comedy' and later, when the idea expanded even more, 'The Voyage That Never Ends'. Neither project was completed yet the 'paradisaal' fragment of the sequence which does exist consists largely of Lowry's novella 'The Forest Path to the Spring', the seventh and final story of the collection Hear Us O Lord from

Heaven Thy Dwelling Place, where the word 'spring' takes on both meanings of water-source and season.

A final pertinent 'mythical' cycle Frye notices, which may be of relevance to the virtually infinite series of cyclical patterns Lowry incorporates into his novel, is that of 'water-symbolism ... from rains to springs, from springs and fountains to brooks and rivers to the sea or the winter snow, and back again'.<sup>33</sup> Both Days of the Dead described in Under the Volcano terminate in thunderstorms and downpours; Quahnahuac's swimming-pools are rendered as 'filled with the water that ceaselessly pours down from the mountains'(9); in Chapter Four, Hugh and Yvonne cross a river, its 'furious little waves, swirling and eddying'(113); there is perennial snow on the summits of the volcanoes; the omnipresent sea metaphor suggests yet further potential cyclical or revolving patterns - Yvonne arrives in Mexico by its western shores, Hugh is to leave it by its eastern, etc.

The Ferris wheel offers a visual constant, a symbol made concrete of the novel's own implied cyclical form. The Ferris wheel's centrality to the lay-out of Under the Volcano is, moreover, reinforced when Lowry places his fairground scene virtually at the epicentre of his day's action. From the equally strategically placed location of Jacques' madhouse, the Consul moves to the fairground, dominated as it is by the Ferris wheel itself. This action virtually draws the Quahnahuac chapters of the book (Two - Seven) to a conclusion; with the wheel poised, as it were, at its apex its next movement must inevitably bring it down again and 'Downhill ...' (234) is the word Lowry chooses to open the next chapter, introducing with it the tone of the remaining events. The Ferris wheel is

described as a 'structure of girders and angle brackets, nuts and bolts'(221), in this sense perhaps analogously revealing some of the book's own 'structure', or rather, deliberately exposing a sense of the mechanics of that structure for us. When the Consul is close, as here, to the wheel, he perceives not simply an impression of its overall circular shape but also gains an insight into how that shape is achieved; likewise, when we, as readers, come across a wheel in the text (any wheel) our notion of the novel as generally cyclical becomes reinforced by a greater understanding of precisely how that cyclicity becomes brought about.

The innumerable actual wheels at the centre of the Volcano in the shape of the Ferris wheel, the Infernal Machine, and all the other carousels and merry-go-rounds, are presented for us together in the grouping of a fairground. The artificiality of the fairground setting is to be given a parallel in the equally artificial circular bull ring where a mock gladiatorial combat takes place; moreover, the fairground and arena both come into play because Mexico is on holiday, and in this sense the book's entire atmosphere, as has already been suggested elsewhere, is bogus. Earlier in the day, Vigil, also on holiday, had suggested that his friends should accompany him to Guanajuato which he is quick to inform the Consul 'is sited in a beautiful circus [*my italics*] of steepy hills'(150). In such ways, and many others, Lowry's circles carry with them convenient overtones of falseness and artificiality, and he takes every available opportunity of underlining such features for us in order to pinpoint 'the form of the book'. For example, the fairground's largest carousel is described as 'thronged by peculiar long-nosed wooden horses mounted on whorled pipes, dipping majestically

as they revolved with a slow piston-like circulation'(217).

The carousel's horses dipping in and out of view must needs suggest the real horses, specifically the fateful horse with the number seven branded on it, which ride in and out of the action of the Volcano. At the beginning of Chapter Four Lowry writes, through the consciousness of Hugh:

The horse half over the hurdle, the diver, the guillotine, the hanged man falling, the murderer's ballet, and the cannon's breath, in Spain or in China frozen in mid-air, the wheel, the piston, poised - (98)

With the introduction of the novel's final central protagonist (Hugh), the day's events could be said to have finally got under way; they are 'poised'; the prophecies, for example, 'murderer's bullet', having been announced, the narrative sets about moving towards their fulfilment. In such a context, Lowry's fairground scene offers a pertinent 'running commentary' on the larger action; and the 'slow piston-like circulation' (217) of the merry-go-round informs us that the inexorable denouement, the 'fatalistic vicious circle ... of predestination',<sup>34</sup> as Stephen Tifft calls it, is still in the process of gathering momentum and has not been forgotten.

The aura of destiny or fate which characterises much of the tone of Under the Volcano, especially in its later stages, has also been frequently 'suggested' to the reader by means of a variety of subtle devices: one such key device is, however, the wheel or circle symbol. As the novel progresses, its wheels appear to be turning and spinning with increasingly destructive force: the storm is rendered as having been 'travelling in a circle'(317) and is also

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said to have 'dispatched its outriders'(317), perhaps implying that its more vital 'riders' (the fatalistic horse of death) are soon to follow; at Parian, the Consul becomes aware of the 'barranca's circuitous abysmal path'(34); one of the sinister police chiefs who presides over the Consul's murder, the Chief of Municipality, is described as making an 'obscene circular movement of the hips' (369). By such means the elements pertaining to the novel's climax (storm, abyss, horse, police chiefs, etc.) become intrinsically imbued by Lowry with cyclic connotations which openly enhance a mounting fateful atmosphere of approaching doom.

The wheel often also symbolises the novel's eternal dialectic between movement and stasis. The characters are frequently depicted as on the move, travelling; and this is most apparent, in an obvious way, when they take the bus from Quahnahuac to the Arena Tomalin and we see them merrily 'rolling'(234) along. Nevertheless, their progress is halted when the pelado boards the bus: appropriately, 'The camion slithered, banking with wheels locked to stop alongside the sidewalk'(236). That the bus has stopped to allow the man who will rob the dying Indian of his last few coins to enter tells us implicitly about Lowry's reason for recording the locking of its wheels. A journey that had promised the possibilities of movement and escape is twice halted, firstly, by the sinister pelado, and secondly, by the incident of the Indian by the roadside. Elsewhere also wheels suggest the initial potential of kinesis and freedom, whilst ironically undermining such themes by simultaneously dwelling on constriction and stasis. Wheels and circles set in motion by Lowry demonstrate that journeys or excursions are under way; yet those wheels and circles eventually

come 'full circle' and invariably one finds oneself back at the beginning again. (Such a method, of course, underlines Lowry's message to the reader whom he informs to read his book 'an indefinite number of times'.)<sup>35</sup> During his supposed final stroll through Quahnahuac in Chapter One, Laruelle crosses the railway tracks and also sees the Tomalin bus yet, nevertheless, seems to be 'travelling in an eccentric orbit round his house for ever'(29); he comes across 'a faded blue Ford, a total wreck ... two bricks had been set under its front wheels against involuntary departure' (19), and this could well be the Consul's own car - when Yvonne asks him about its whereabouts early in Chapter Two he replies that he has 'lost it' (57), implying that a potential escape route has been symbolically lost too. The equation of rapidly spinning wheels with a speedy escape route is, however, already ironically undercut in the very first phrase of the day: '... "A corpse will be transported by express!" '(48); and, appropriately, the Consul's own poem about rapid and lasting escape is 'surrounded [my italics] with scratchy drawings - of a club, a wheel, even a long black box like a coffin'(331).

Stasis and restriction are themes dwelt on by Lowry throughout Under the Volcano: they probably attain their apotheosis, however, when the action moves to the bull ring, the Arena Tomalin. Just as Lowry had announced the tone of Chapter Eight with its first word: 'Downhill ...'(234), so a similar proclamation heralds the constriction theme to be encountered in Chapter Nine: 'ARENA Tomalin ...'(256). The 'rude fence that enclosed the ring' (257) again prepares us, in an introductory manner, for themes of entrapment and torture, as does the metaphor of people's 'heads as if

thrust through luxurious stocks'(257). The bull's repeated 'circuit[s] of the ring'(258), its 'half-despairing circulations' (261), become symbolic correlatives for the condition of the protagonists, and by extension, also for mankind at large. Yvonne's recollections in this chapter allow Lowry to apply his theme of entrapment or imprisonment to humanity in general. She recalls standing in Times Square 'watching the illuminated news aloft travelling around the Times Building, news of disaster, of suicide, of banks failing, of approaching war'(267). In such an ingenious way, Lowry suggests that the world is itself caught in a restricting cycle of repeated disasters from which it can never escape. That the bull-ring becomes analogously related, by nature of its associations of 'restriction', to disaster, collapse and war had already been suggested earlier in the novel when Hugh recalls Weber speaking to him of the Mexican revolution: 'Quahnahuac! That's where they crucified the women in the bull-rings during the revolution and set the bulls at them'(103). Lowry's cyclical theory of history is assisted in the present context by nature of the pun he can achieve on the word 'revolution': in Chapter One, the perambulating Laruelle strolls down Quahnahuac's 'Arendida de la Revolucion'(29).<sup>36</sup>

Kristofer Doross writes of the 'wheel of the law'(221) terming it a 'Buddhist image [for] the everlasting round of births and rebirths, of ever-recurring imprisonment in sorrow, suffering, disease, old age and death', and linking the wheel image in the novel totally to 'The inevitable destiny to which the Consul has committed himself through his abuse of freedom'.<sup>37</sup> Admittedly, the wheel does frequently, as suggested above, entail recurring imprisonment (although the Consul and Yvonne themselves, at least,

avoid the disease and old age of which Doross speaks); nevertheless, it is not simply Firmin, but humanity in general, ~~when~~ it would seem, Lowry wishes to posit as eternally imprisoned. Moreover, the Consul's fate would also appear to be suggested as symptomatic of larger forces (all-encompassing cyclical patterns, perhaps) than simply his own abuse of freedom. The sense of fate which dominates or pre-determines many of his actions, and the actions of Hugh and Yvonne for that matter, is frequently related to wheeling gyrations over which he (and they) has no control. For example, fate or predestination of sorts is already introduced in the first paragraph of the book proper when Lowry informs us that Quahnahuac is situated 'to be exact, on the nineteenth parallel, in about the same latitude as ... the southernmost tip of Hawaii [or] the town of Juggernaut in India, on the Bay of Bengal (9); later we will come to realise that Yvonne was born in Hawaii and the Firmin brothers in Northern India, thus the 'wheel' of the global parallel has sought to inexorably draw them together along its axis. Similarly, the terrain of Quahnahuac itself, both outdoors and indoors, appears endowed with spiralling vortices from which individuals are unable to escape: the Consul remembers the 'anguish' of [a] return [*my italics*] to Quahnahuac from Oaxaca 'circling down from the Tres Marias in the Plymouth, seeing the town below through the mist'(93); similarly, at Laruelle's, after recalling once more the frightening picture of the falling and hellbound Los Borrachones, Geoffrey is symbolically condemned to descend 'the iron spiral staircase'(212) of one of Jacques' towers. The wheel of fate, the circle of predestination, call it what you will, would, therefore, frequently seem to be of a peculiar type: it is one constructed and highlighted by Lowry himself. The Consul's destiny becomes in such a context

'fictional'; that is to say it is overtly controlled by the author.<sup>38</sup> Although it could be argued that this is the case of all literature, it is not revealed as such in all literature. Lowry's wheel symbol allows him to openly demonstrate the artificiality of his melodramatic narrative and thus to expose his symbol's relationship to the self-conscious structure that constantly informs his novel. For example, returning home with Yvonne from the Hotel Bella Vista, the Consul peers into a shop window and sees:

a photographic enlargement, purporting to show the disintegration of a glacial deposit in the Sierra Madre, of a great rock split by forest fires. This curious, and curiously sad picture - to which the nature of the other exhibits lent an added ironic poignance - set behind and above the already spinning flywheel of the presses, was called: La Despedida. (59)

The split rock undoubtedly symbolises the rift between the Consul and Yvonne which will become irrevocably enlarged (as in the enlarged photograph in fact) as the day progresses, whilst the 'flywheel of the presses' suggests that this process has been caught within the machine of fictional production. It is a fate to be fulfilled by (and only by) the process of reading the printed work in which it will be chronicled. On the previous page to the description of the flywheel and the presses, Yvonne notices the volcanoes and thinks: 'Born in Hawaii, she'd had volcanoes in her life before, however', and then, immediately afterwards, sees: 'Seated on a park bench under a tree in the square, his feet barely touching the ground, [a] little scribe [who] was already crashing away on a giant typewriter' (58). The scribe at his typewriter may be present to announce the authorial presence of Lowry himself in his role of fate co-ordinator; indeed,

the prophecy of Hawaii on the nineteenth parallel, proclaimed in the novel's very first paragraph, now assumes the necessary 'added ironic poignance'(59) as it is here that we are told it was Yvonne's birthplace!

The analogy of the novel as 'film' allows Lowry a similar ingenious conflation of his wheel symbol to suggest the artificially created fate to which his protagonists are condemned. Paul Tiessen writes:

It is perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of Lowry's preoccupation with film techniques that he uses images from the cinematic process itself - particularly the image of the motion picture reel, with its fragmented rendering of reality - to establish metaphors which will express the mechanised certainty of man's spiritual death. 39

Indeed, once a film has been set in motion its conclusion can no longer be altered. If the Consul's final day is to be regarded as being revealed to us through the medium of Laruelle's film of the same then Firmin's fate has, in such a manner, been 'fixed' even before the day itself (its projection) begins. At the Farolito, the Consul recalls 'the spinning flywheel behind'(340) demonstrating that most of the film in which he is appearing is now also behind him - not much footage remains until the 'end'. In his letter to Cape, Lowry states that the wheel in Chapter One (he is ostensibly referring to the Ferris wheel) can be regarded 'in an obvious movie sense as the wheel of time whirling backwards'.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, even before Laruelle reaches Bustamante's cinema, Lowry has thrice drawn attention to the dominating presence of the Ferris wheel (16, 18, 21) on his terrain; moreover, Laruelle himself has been

circling around his own house and noticing also Mexico's 'rolling  
 [my italics] glorious country'(20). With the mention of the 'first  
 newsreels from the Spanish war, that have come back again'(32), a  
 series of connections or equations between the large wheel, ex-  
 director Laruelle's own cyclic perambulations and a cinema reel  
 become overtly introduced; and therefore, at the close of the chapter,  
 when the 'luminous wheel'(47) revolves backwards it is as if trapped  
 in a cinema (Bustaméntes) about to watch the film of the Consul's  
 final day. Kilgallin writes: 'By using Laruelle's medium (film)  
 and message (the story of Geoffrey and Yvonne) Lowry was able to  
 structure both form and content around the cinema wheel with twelve  
 spoked chapters'.<sup>41</sup> The remorseless employment of various wheeling  
 motions throughout the Volcano often betrays Lowry's notion of his  
 narrative as film; indeed, as a film being simultaneously shot and  
 projected, in that the wheel can conveniently assume the guise of  
 both spool and reel. For example, at one point in Chapter Seven  
 Laruelle says to the Consul: 'do you realize what extraordinary  
 allowances are being made for you by the world which has to cope  
 with you, yes, are even now being made by me?', and immediately  
 afterwards the Consul gazes up dreamily at the Ferris wheel near  
 them' (221). Jacques' words 'made by me' could, in this instance,  
 relate to the film he is (in a sense) making of the Consul at the time;  
 and, as such, the Ferris wheel may suggest cameras once again swinging  
 into action (also, the inclusion of the adjective 'dreamily' may be  
 of significance in terms of the cliché of the movies as in some way  
 representing a 'dream machine'). Elsewhere, slowly or quickly  
 revolving wheels may serve to hint at film speed depending on the  
 pace or momentum which the accompanying action assumes, for example,  
 as they return home from the Hotel Bella Vista early in the morning,

the Consul and Yvonne pass 'the great wheel brood[ing] under the trees, brilliant, motionless'(57) suggesting, by way of a cinematic analogy, that we are virtually seeing a 'still' as opposed to a moving piece of film; and, indeed, much of the material of Lowry's early chapters is merely expository as he meticulously sets the scene, as it were, for subsequent cross-textual back-tracking. Later, however, in the Salon Ofelia, the Consul thinks of 'an illusion, a whirling cerebral chaos'(309): as events are in the process of attaining their climax, the analogous cinematic 'illusion' must needs speed up too as yet more images become thrown at us, or 'exposed', with ever-increasing alacrity. Lowry's claim that his book 'should be seen [my italics] as essentially trochal'<sup>42</sup> is also a concept perhaps more befitting a film than a piece of literary narrative in that the former art form is, once it has been shown, merely rewound and then reprojected over and over again. Yvonne recalls sitting in a cinema thinking that 'her own destiny was buried in the distant past, and might for all she knew repeat itself in the future'(269); a little later she asks herself: 'Was she doomed to an endless succession of tragedies'(269), Lowry perhaps wishing us to speculate that her tragedies are not plural in number but simply the same one (the book/film Under the Volcano) repeating itself again and again. In Chapter Twelve, the Consul notices that in Parian's square, 'The same ragged platoon of soldiers still seemed to be crossing it, as in some disrupted movie repeating itself'(347). Again, any number of re-readings of the text, by any respective reader (or viewer), will inevitably encounter this simile; and therefore, once more Lowry implies, through his cinematic metaphor, that there is no escape from his house (or cinema) of fiction.<sup>43</sup> The novel's never-ending 'unspeakable circuit' (226) becomes intrinsically related to a kind



of nightmare vision which we are forever 'forced' to witness. Lowry's phrase 'no one could stop the machine'(226) again implies, in an almost Kafka-esque way, that the reader of Under the Volcano, like the K. figure in Kafka's fiction, is enmeshed in self-perpetuating events over which he has no immediate control. Sherill Grace, writing of the influence of German Expressionist films on Lowry, says 'the fairground scene in Chapter Seven of Volcano, like the fairground in Caligari and in several of these films, symbolises not only a madly revolving world perceived by the protagonist, but the helplessness of the individual soul caught up in superior whirling forces'.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, it is through the convoluted series of cinematic references that the reader of Lowry's novel is made to share the oppressive 'reeling' delirium Lowry imposes on his characters.

The wheel or cycle assists in deliberately projecting our thoughts backwards and forwards across the space, as opposed to through the time (a chronological reading), of the text; it deliberately invites us to make a series of analogies or comparisons between similar situations or predicaments. For example, at Parian, the Consul notices two children one of whom 'turned a succession of cartwheels on the lush grass plot'(348); a brief event which perhaps takes us backwards (or forwards) to both the 'Two young Americans(11) or the 'two little girls'(46) seen by Laruelle in Chapter One. Similarly, Lowry makes a series of comparisons between the cantina La Sepultura, visited by Hugh and Yvonne in Chapter Four, and the Hotel y Restaurant El Popo which they pass through in Chapter Eleven, for example, at the former inn Hugh thinks that the beer had a 'half metallic'(116) taste to it, whilst in the latter he describes it as

tasting 'like gun-metal'(326): strategically both drinking places are rendered as having 'round tables' (116, 325) in this way enticing us as readers to compare them; and moreover, to regard that comparison as constituting yet another tiny wheel in the machine. (Indeed at La Sepultura Hugh and Yvonne see an armadillo which 'ran off, as if on tiny wheels'(117); Yvonne wants to buy the animal but is dissuaded by Hugh who tells her it will only tunnel into the ground and 'not only never come back ... but if you try to stop it it will do its damndest to pull you down the hole too'(117). These words have an obvious larger significance by implicitly relating to the predicament at the close of the novel in which the Consul himself enters a hole (the abyss/death) pulling Yvonne with him; and in such a convoluted manner the armadillo's 'tiny wheels' are also made to become integral to the larger wheel of the form of the book itself.) Frequently therefore, the wheel assists in breaking down the novel's linearity by allowing for an intercutting to a different section of the text; or rather, it assumes the guise of a code making such confluences possible. At one point Dr. Vigil contrives 'to roll up his paper into a neat cylindrical tube'(142) suggesting perhaps that he may use it in the manner of a telescope to isolate an event in the distance. Vigil's constant refrain of whether drinking has not killed the Consul already hints, albeit whimsically, at his 'trained' doctor's eye which can locate the instance in the not too distant future when the Consul will be 'killed'. Moreover, Vigil's 'swift rippling circular crawling gesture'(142) as he talks of the Consul's ' - progresión ... a ratos'(142) - by degrees - foreshadows Firmin's constant circular progress towards his ultimate fate; and, significantly, in the Farolito the Chief of Municipality appropriately

addresses the Consul with the phrase: 'Progresión al culo'(369) - progression at an end!

The symbol of the wheel, circle or cycle permeates in a variety of ways the whole of Under the Volcano. As an ordering system it brings a peculiarly formal, indeed 'perfect' sense of shape to the structuring processes which implicitly underline all statements in the novel. Mythic correlatives, timelessness and eternity, return, recurrence and the form of the book are themes which Lowry's wheel symbol seeks to enhance and inter-connect; and hopefully I have partially demonstrated how these concerns become achieved. Ultimately, however, the wheel remains isolated in that it continually seeks to draw attention to itself as a method through which order, form, structure, etc. become instigated. In such a manner the patterns of correspondence it is able to generate become, appropriately, virtually endless. It is the wheel's self-conscious manipulation which lends Under the Volcano much of its over-contrived tone, yet the ideal reader's own active self-conscious re-manipulation of the symbol becomes fundamental to his remorseless desire to re-read the text an indefinite number of times in order for him to engage in the infinite process of imaginative connection-making which the symbol invites. In this way not only do the ends justify the means, the two become inexorably linked, almost as if they were fixed on an ever-revolving wheel.

WHEELS, CIRCLES, CYCLES - NOTES

1. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters (London, 1967), pp.70-71.
2. - See Victor Doyen, 'Elements Toward a Spatial Reading of Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano,' English Studies, 50 (1968), 65-74.
3. - In my interview with Margerie Lowry I asked her if Lowry had not considered some of his areas of reference as wilfully obscure: she replied that Lowry had once said to her that it was immaterial if each specific allusion was 'understood'; rather, he believed that the tone of the book would echo implicitly in the collective subconscious of Western civilisation. (See Appendix 1.)
4. - David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano : Myth, Symbol, Meaning (New York, 1978), p.8.
5. - Translated in a footnote by Stephen Tifft as 'I believe that the vulture is sweet to Prometheus and that the Ixions amuse themselves in hell' in 'Tragedy as a Meditation on Itself: Reflexiveness in Under the Volcano,' in The Art of Malcolm Lowry, edited by Anne Smith, Vision Critical Studies (London, 1978), p.70.
6. - Richard Barber, A Companion to World Mythology (Harmondsworth, 1979) p.135.
7. - The incident haunts the Consul for much of his final day; moreover, the 'red-hot coals' have a pertinent correlative in the volcanic terrain of Under the Volcano itself (see Volcano, Ravine, Geology). At the very end of the novel the Consul imagines himself 'falling, falling into the volcano ... there was this noise of foisting lava in his ears, horribly, it was in eruption' (375). That the Consul possibly regards a fall into the volcanic crater as his ultimate fate may suggest that his private act of murder on the Samaritan is now provided with a suitable retribution; that the wheel of fate has, in yet another sense, now come full circle. Lowry possibly also links Greek and Aztec myth in this allusion (Empedokles too threw himself into the crater of a volcano) when we realise that sacrifices to Xiuhtecuhtli, the Aztec god of fire, were achieved by casting human victims onto beds of red-hot coals.
8. - See Ronald G. Walker, Infernal Paradise: Mexico and the Modern English Novel (Los Angeles, 1978), p.259.
9. - Richard Barber, A Companion to World Mythology, pp.240-41.
10. - Further Sisyphean manipulation is achieved at the Salon Ofelia where the Consul finds himself immured in the lavatory unable to leave it until he is provided with a 'stone' (295, 296, 297) with which to clean himself.

11. - For a much fuller, though somewhat tenuous, exploration of the Sisyphus myth in relation to the novel, see Jim Barnes, 'The Myth of Sisyphus in Under the Volcano', Prairie Schooner (Winter, 1968), 341-48.
12. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.88.
13. - John Gross in his Joyce. Fontana Modern Masters, (London, 1978) writes that:  
'The two most fundamental axioms of the Wake are that history endlessly repeats itself, and that the part always implies the whole. Civilisations rise and fall according to a preordained cyclic pattern, and as the wheel turns the same characters, events, and institutions come round again under different guises' (p.84).  
  
Gross also argues that in the twentieth century a cyclic view of history is somewhat outdated:  
'We know too much; the old escape-routes from history have been sealed off, and it has become progressively harder for an educated writer to maintain a world-view as archaic and compact as Joyce's'. p.85.  
  
It is debatable whether Joyce, like Lowry after him, actually 'maintained' a cyclic theory of history; nevertheless, they both 'employ' such a theory in order to enhance, conveniently, aspects of the narrative structures of their respective works.
14. - Richard Barber, A Companion to World Mythology, p.252.
15. - The Consul is trying to recall (and Lowry alluding to) the following passage from Shelley:

But I remember  
Two miles on this side of the fort, the road  
Crosses a deep ravine; 'tis rough and narrow,  
And winds with short turns down the precipice;  
And in its depth there is a mighty rock,  
Which has, from unimaginable years,  
Sustained itself with terror and with toil  
Over a gulf, and with the agony  
With which it clings seems slowly coming down;  
Even as a wretched soul hour after hour,  
Clings to the mass of life; yet clinging, leans;  
And leaning, makes more dark the dread abyss  
In which it fears to fall ...

The Cenci, Act III, Sc.1, lines 245-257.

(I have quoted the passage at some length in that much of it relates directly to the whole scene invoked by Lowry, not only at the beginning of Chapter Twelve but throughout Under the Volcano in general.)

16. - Richard Barber, A Companion to World Mythology, p.261.

17. - The protagonist of Lowry's posthumously published novel October Ferry to Gabriola, Ethan Llewellyn, is a graduate of the 'same' college, albeit jokingly disguised as Ixion College, Ely.
18. - Donald Attwater, The Penguin Dictionary of Saints (Harmondsworth, 1965) pp.210-11.
19. - B.W. Martin, The Dictionary of the Occult (London, 1979), p.34.
20. - Quoted by Tony Kilgallin in Lowry (Erin, Ontario, 1973), p.187.
21. - Kristofer Doross, Malcolm Lowry's Infernal Paradise (Uppsala, 1976), pp.147-48.
22. - Within the context of a mystical or karmic spiritual release, Lowry possibly alludes to another oriental attribute of the circle or coil, that of Kundalini or the serpent power. Kundalini literally means 'coiled'. B.W. Martin characterises it as, 'the vital and vitalising force or power which lies dormant at the base of the spine. By various techniques it can be aroused and raised successively through six chakras or centres in the body to a seventh situated at the crown of the head. There is a progressive increase and intensification of natural functions, physical and mental abilities, spiritual and psychic awareness and ultimately, at the seventh chakra, the achievement of self awareness and union with true reality.' See B.W. Martin, The Dictionary of the Occult, p.72. At the Farolito the Consul is said to have 'escaped through seven states' (358), and at one point feels 'a strange release, almost a sense of attainment. His mind was clear. Physically he seemed better too' (354). By nature of such a possibly obscure (almost obscurantist) series of references, Lowry may, therefore, allow the Consul a release from the oppressive wheel of fate into a transcendentalist realm of inner harmony after all.
23. - G.P. Jones, 'Malcolm Lowry: Time and the Artist, University of Toronto Quarterly, Vol.51, No.2 (Winter 1981/82), p.201.
24. - Laura E. Casari, 'Malcolm Lowry's Drunken Divine Comedy: Under the Volcano and Shorter Fiction (Doctoral dissertation: University of Nebraska, 1967), p.187.
25. - George Holmes, Dante. (Oxford University Press, 1980), p.35.
26. - Lowry employment of the word 'ellipse' in its plural form - 'ellipses' - affords him the ambiguity of being able to punningly incorporate the word 'ellipsis' into his design whose plural is the same. An 'ellipsis' is literally an omission from a piece of writing of words needed to complete the grammatical construction in order for the sense to be fully expressed. Such a definition may hint at the fact that each time we read the Volcano 'omissions' in our reading entail that a sense of 'total' structure is also inevitably lacking.

27. - Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, New Jersey, 1957), p.159.
28. - The moon's connections to the sea are further explored by Lowry when he cites the maritime terms 'the old astronomers gave the places on the moon'(128); moreover, Hugh had bought in Mexico City 'a second-hand copy of Jack London's Valley of the Moon(99), whilst a couple of chapters later recalls having read the same author's 'The Sea Wolf' (161).
29. - I charted a great many Consul/Christ parallels in my own unpublished M.A. dissertation 'Bridging the Abyss: Polarities and Parallels in Malcom Lowry's Under the Volcano' (The University of East Anglia, 1978).
30. - Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p.160.
31. - William H. New, Malcolm Lowry (Toronto, 1971)p.39.
32. - Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Myths of the Zodiac (London, 1978),p.43.
33. - Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p.160.
34. - Stephen Tifft, 'Tragedy as a Meditation on Itself: Reflexiveness in Under the Volcano', in The Art of Malcolm Lowry edited by Anne Smith, Vision Critical Studies (London, 1978), p.55.
35. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.88.
36. - Tony Kilgallin, in his Lowry, suggests that: 'Like Vico Spengler and Joyce, Lowry believed in the four-phase wheel of history: theocracy (Eden), aristocracy (Cortez), democracy (The Western hemisphere) and chaos (the twentieth century ... Under the Volcano, like Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound and Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus, ends and simultaneously begins with the thunderstorm terrifying and then reawakening mankind to the wheel of history and the cyclical return' ( p.210).
37. - Krostofor Dorosz, Malcolm Lowry's Infernal Paradise, p.147.
38. - Northrop Frye casts an interesting glance at this question when he states that 'a "good story" is simply a clearly designed one. The introduction of an omen or portent or the device of making a whole story the fulfilment of a prophecy given at the beginning, is an example. Such a device suggests, in its existential projection, a conception of ineluctable fate or hidden omnipotent will. Actually, it is a piece of pure literary design, giving the beginning some symmetrical relationship with the end, and the only ineluctable will involved is that of the author'.  
Anatomy of Criticism, p.139.

39. - Paul G. Tiessen, 'Malcolm Lowry and the Cinema', Canadian Literature, No.44 (Spring, 1970), p.45.

Tiessen also interestingly observes that Lowry's graphic descriptions of his centrally placed carousels and machines 'further emphasize his central preoccupation with the mechanized, circular image of the movie reel [in that the] construction and movement of [these] machines are remarkably similar to those of the innumerable forerunners of the modern movie reel itself'. p.46.

40. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.71.
41. - Tony Kilgallin, Lowry, p.133.
42. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.88.
43. - The Farolito shares many 'overlapping' features with Bustamente's cinema. By connecting the place where his 'film' ends and the place from where it becomes, at least metaphorically, projected, Lowry again implies another closed and continuous circuit.
44. - Sherril E. Grace, 'Malcolm Lowry and the Expressionist Vision', in The Art of Malcolm Lowry, edited by Anne Smith, Vision Critical Studies (London, 1978), p.103.



PART THREE : MOTIVAL SYSTEMS OF ORDER

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SIGNS

We now see a torn piece of La Stampa and an empty wine bottle. A lot of construction work was going on.

A lot of construction work was going on around Witt, scarring and muddying the entire hillside upon which he was told he would find Villa Nastia. Its immediate surroundings had more or less been tidied up, forming an oasis of quiet amidst the clanging and knocking wilderness of clay and cranes. There even gleamed a boutique among the shops forming a hemicycle around a freshly planted young rowan under which some litter had already been left, such as a workman's empty bottle and an Italian newspaper.

Nabokov, Transparent Things.

How closely Lowry's literary technique recalls the art of the cinema is emphasised in his frequently ingenious combination

of visual and audial motifs which are variously spread through his novel, and which stimulate the characters thoughts and movements; and, by extension, also openly impinge themselves on the reader. As Paul Tiessen writes, these varied cinematically-orientated sign-posts are 'visual landmarks which recurrently draw attention to the deep, spiritual currents of the novel'.<sup>1</sup> They thrust themselves upon protagonist and reader alike by jumping into view, interrupting the logical course of the action or discussion, and thereby suggesting yet another possible layer of meaning. Although, on the one hand, these pictorial and linguistic leitmotifs belong to the neutral, external world and do not appear to possess an inherently complex series of symbolic meanings; on the other hand, the characters' (and also the implied reader's) associative consciousnesses often entails that the signs correspond with a personal and primarily subjective interpretation. Under the Volcano is characterised in all its aspects by its seeming inexhaustibility; and the 'circumstantial' environment too, in which the signs function, must again invariably puzzle or confuse the attentive reader with its extensive possibilities: signs, newspaper headlines, articles, advertisements, cries, foreign phrases, posters, postcards, photographs, paintings, songs, lyrics, catch phrases, etc., all waiting to attract attention to themselves; to enmesh the reader ever further into a dense verbal labyrinth. Again I cannot possibly hope to dwell on each possible aspect of Lowry's forest of signs, only to speculate on a variety of the associative or organisational potential to which they invariably 'point'.

In a novel which deals, at least periodically, as there would appear to be no single central theme within Under the Volcano,

with aspects of the Fall of man, the mysterious garden sign, which Firmin encounters at three different stages of the narrative and which also constitutes the book's epilogue, comes to represent a sort of thread, although an entangled one, within the religiously-coloured labyrinth. Lowry endows his sign with an 'oblong pallid face'(132) suggesting a virtually human quality and this human quality becomes reinforced by the verb Lowry chooses with which to further animate the sign for it is made to stare at the Consul, thus immediately becoming hostile and threatening. From the public garden the sign glares menacingly at the Consul forcing him (almost) to make a rash and incorrect translation: 'You like this garden? Why is it yours? We evict those who destroy'(132). This incorrect translation carries with it, of course, as discussed elsewhere, immediate implications relating to the Fall. The product of Firmin's translation produces hardly 'any emotion whatsoever, unless a kind of colourless cold, a white agony, an agony chill as that iced mescal drunk in the Hotel Canada on the morning of Yvonne's departure'(132). The metaphor which Lowry uses to compare the Consul's reaction to the sign (mescal) pertinently fits into the sign's message in terms of the novel in general in that mescal is the drink which has its most destructive effect on Firmin's body and mind. Of course, the sign has been mis-translated and it is only later in the novel - (235) - that the correct interpretation is provided. (Daniel B. Dodson points out the omission of 'the superfluous question mark after "jardin" and the inverted mark before "que"' in the sign's second appearance, going on to say that this probably accounts for the Consul's correct translation<sup>2</sup> - in fact, whether Firmin does translate the sign again here is left ambiguous, as the chapter is seen through Hugh's eyes.) Eventually,

the sign makes its third appearance (in the version encountered on the road to Tomalin) as an epilogue. In a Biblical context, the notice provides Lowry with the opportunity for irony: the words, which appear as a stern order from God, are made to materialise before the Consul's field of vision, yet Geoffrey, too wrecked to even look after his own appearance, let alone his own garden, seems to be the wrong person chosen for the job of tending the earthly Eden. However, a contradictory irony of sorts is brought into play when the 'earthly Paradise', in which the sign stands, and which asks for protection from the outside, is already deemed to be implicitly rotten from the inside. Perhaps Lowry also intends to illustrate the impossibility of restoring original innocence in his little public park which is, of course, not just that but also a symbol for Mexico itself (preyed on by Fascists); or for the world at large (in upheaval, and about to face the outbreak of the Second World War).

Similar multi-layered ironies surround the thematic relevance of the apparently meaningless inscription on Laruelle's tower: 'No se puede vivir sin amar'(11), and these become reinforced when the word love, within the context of Under the Volcano in general, implies both, on the one hand, affection and, on the other, sexual activity. Yvonne, for example, having (probably) been the lover of all three of the male protagonists of the novel becomes viciously branded by the sign. Throughout Under the Volcano sexual love is depicted as existing in a barren and sterile way; as flowering 'obscenely' in a landscape of dead emotions. Yvonne has betrayed the Consul (and so also, implicitly, have Hugh and Jacques). Furthermore, upon her arrival the Consul is so

drunk that he cannot make love to Yvonne. Many critics have pointed to this incident as another example of the Consul's 'failure' yet few have suggested that the circumstances of the scene are in themselves rather perverse: Yvonne has not seen the Consul for over a year; at the time she has barely been reunited with him an hour; moreover, she is no longer his wife in that they are divorced. However, later in the day Geoffrey is able to find a sort of love, although of a bestial nature, with the prostitute in the Farolito.

Of all the various 'circumstantial' sign-posts in the novel, some paintings appear to exert a profound influence on the Consul, and thus on the course of Lowry's fiction. The Consul is a fan of the French primitivist 'Douanier' Rousseau, whose bright and gaudy jungle-like paintings appear to represent a correlative to the Consul's own hallucinogenic vision of his surroundings, especially his own garden. Recalling the interior of Vigil's consulting room, the only detail Firmin vividly seems to remember are the Goya-esque pictures of 'ancient Spanish surgeons' (141), whose grotesque and weird faces analogously appear to represent many of the novel's minor characters, being both strangely macabre yet humorous at the same time.<sup>3</sup> Breughel's and Bosch's apocalyptic visions become invoked in the prohibitionist poster Los Borrachones - the Drunkards, which, funnily enough, appears to represent a situation in which the Consul metaphorically finds himself. The picture depicts doomed drunkards caught in a destructive maelstrom of terrifying monsters and falling bottles being hurled towards the deepest recesses of hell, whilst their sober partners, shielded by angels, are transported upwards to heaven. The picture combines

the opposing aspects of salvation and damnation which Lowry continually plays off against each other throughout the Volcano: the Consul is offered the choice of opting for alcoholic despair or the non-alcoholic paradise evoked by (and represented by) Yvonne. Similarly, it also foreshadows the final outcome with Yvonne's spiritual 'Himmelfahrt' being contrasted with the Consul's abrupt descent into the barranca; yet, as suggested elsewhere, just as a glib solution of the salvation/damnation question eventually becomes denied, so the painting too is shown up as ludicrous, and also defying a pat allegorical reading. The lone females on the painting ascending heavenwards are rendered as 'casting half-jealous glances downward' (203), whilst, simultaneously, the faces of 'their plummeting husbands' depict 'the most unmistakable relief'(203); similarly, for Firmin, the promise of a non-alcoholic paradise is a prospect which he hardly regards as 'paradisaal', whilst Yvonne's drinking (especially of mescal itself in Chapter Eleven) hints at the fact that she too may ultimately be casting a half-jealous glance at her plummeting husband. Furthermore, the simple equation of Yvonne 'saved' and the Consul 'damned' at the end of the narrative is also not quite so simple: Yvonne in actuality falls from a ladder (to the heavens) and becomes trampled by a horseman of the Apocalypse(?) and then feels herself rising upwards; similarly, the Consul feels himself ascending to the summit of the volcano and is then in actuality cast into the ravine. (That the Consul may possibly achieve salvation of sorts is hinted at in another picture he sees at the Farolito: it is a calender 'set to the future, for next month, December' and shows 'a stag ... by a river down which a man and a woman were paddling a birch-bark canoe'; seeing the name of the

month the Consul asks himself: 'where would he be then?' (352).<sup>4</sup>

On one level Firmin may achieve salvation and thus find himself, reunited with Yvonne?, in a paradise; on the other hand, damnation may be his fate, and thus again the picture proves highly ironical.)

Throughout the entire day's pilgrimage, objective facts are frequently taken out of their immediate surroundings and thus subjectively twisted or inverted by the central characters (and Lowry possibly also suggests that the reader too must 'read' each sign in an individual manner). The Mexican landscape becomes crammed with posters and advertisements, and, although these are harmless in themselves, they soon take on ominous overtones in that they cast their shadows so closely onto the course of the action itself.

The cinema advertisement for the film 'Las Manos de Orlac', starring Peter Lorre, is forever preying on both protagonists' and readers' minds throughout, for wherever they (and we) happen to wander, the sign invariably appears. The characters' attempts to read behind its lines (or four words), so to speak, openly reflects on Lowry's intention to invite the reader to go beyond the text of the Volcano and thus apply his knowledge of the film to the storyline. Based on the book 'The Hands of Orlac' by Maurice Renard, the film tells the story of concert pianist, Stephen Orlac, given the hands of a supposed murder after his own are injured in an accident. Hugh cannot remember the exact plot, explaining it to Yvonne in a slightly different way; nevertheless, his version affords Lowry the opportunity of making the film (or at least its title) become yet



another dynamically manipulated correlative for the Consul,  
and also, to some extent, for the other protagonists as well:

'I think I've seen the Peter Lorre movie  
somewhere. He's a great actor but its a  
lousy picture ... It's all about a pianist  
who has a sense of guilt because he thinks  
his hands are a murderer's or something and  
keeps washing the blood off them. Perhaps  
they really are a murderer's, but I forget.'(114)

Geoffrey too is obsessed by various guilt complexes. After the  
war he was court-martialled for, it seems, disposing of German  
submarine officers by casting them into a burning furnace while in  
command of the s.s. Samaritan. Lowry never states whether the crime  
in fact took place or whether it is merely a product of the Consul's  
mind; nevertheless, Firmin himself seems unable to distinguish  
between fact and fiction and, like Orlac, he is sometimes absolutely  
convinced of his guilt. Feelings of guilt are, however, not  
solely attributed in Under the Volcano to the Consul alone. In the  
middle of the book, in the middle of the day, and in the middle of  
his life, Hugh himself has the following thoughts:

I am a prodigy. I am young. I am a dashing fellow.  
Am I not? You are a liar, said the trees tossing  
in the garden. You are a traitor, rattled the  
plantain leaves. And a coward too, put in some fitful  
sounds of music that might have meant that in the  
zocalo the fair was beginning. And they are losing  
the battle of the Ebro. Because of you, said the  
wind. A traitor even to your journalist friends you  
like to run down and who are really courageous men,  
admit it - (154)

Hugh, like his half-brother, has also metaphorically transposed  
Orlac's murderer's hands onto himself; moreover, like Orlac, he

becomes a victim of his own circumstances; he confuses outside or external circumstances (the Spanish War/the transplanting of the hands) onto his own inadequacy, and thus becomes part of the situation at large, just as the hands become a part of Orlac. Later in the chapter both brothers study a photograph on the wall of the Consul's room of the s.s. Samaritan - 'Everything about the Samaritan was a ruse'(188), the Consul says and, like that aspect of the ship, the two brothers tend to feel that some aspects of their own personalities are also like a ruse. (The use of the word 'Samaritan' of course also forms something of a leitmotif throughout the text: in Chapter Eight both Hugh and Geoffrey will fail to act as Samaritans to the man dying by the wayside, whilst in the final chapter both Hugh and Yvonne will fail the dying Geoffrey, whilst, similarly, he will fail the dying Yvonne, etc.) In Chapter One (a year later) Laruelle also makes himself a vital part of the quartet via the Orlac 'poster looming above him now showing the murderer ... An artist with a murderer's hands; that was the ticket, the hieroglyphic of the times.... Or was it, by some uncomfortable stretch of the imagination, M. Laruelle himself?(31) Perhaps Laruelle too feels guilt of sorts by believing he has betrayed the Consul?<sup>5</sup>

The many newspaper articles which sporadically interrupt the course of the action often relate actual events happening in Mexico, Spain, and, more generally, all over the world, thus greatly enlarging many pertinent dimensions of the text. Frequently, the Consul's/Lowry's associative self-absorbed mind correlates a direct relationship between an external or global event and his own

predicament. Such is the case when he reads:

Sagrimento Combate en Mora de Ebro. Los Aviones de los Rebeldes Bombardean Barcelona. Es inevitable la muerte del Papa. The Consul started; this time, an instant, he had thought the headlines referred to himself. But of course it was only the poor Pope whose death was inevitable. (217)

Lowry ends the chapter with the same reference to the inevitable death of the Pope implying that the Consul is absolutely correct in establishing an equation of destinies (in fact in November 1938 Pope Pius XI was gravely ill and about to die). Hugh constantly seeks to draw parallels and conclusions between his own battle being lost and the losing of the Battle of the Ebro: both events (the Pope and the Ebro), if considered within the larger context of human destiny in general, reflect on aspects of the dying civilisation of Europe, of which the Consul, and perhaps Hugh too, becomes a symbolic representative.

Just as a glimpsed newspaper heading can immediately impinge on the Consul's alcohol sharpened sensitivity, so an audial sign has an even greater chance of suggesting itself to the drunkard's inebriate/hungover state of mind. In the hour which precedes his death especially, the Consul notices the evening 'filled by odd noises, like those of sleep. The roll of a drum somewhere was a revolution, a cry down the street someone being murdered, brakes grinding far away a soul in pain. The plucked chords of a guitar hung over his head. A bell clanged frantically in the distance'(353). The Consul's highly confused state of mind once again confounds the realms of reality and imagination (and,

simultaneously, Lowry is able ingeniously to confound linear boundaries of his fiction). Firmin distinguishes the different noises such as the drum roll, the car brakes, a bell and the chords of a guitar, but the noises lose their individuality (and their banality) by becoming gigantically exaggerated into a sort of universal chaos created by the subjective mind. As such the drum becomes that heralding the Consul's own execution, whilst the bell becomes associated with, and representative of many things: it is the bell that speaks the inscription above the gates of Dante's hell: 'dolente ... dolore';<sup>6</sup> it is the bell employed in a metaphor much earlier in the novel, now literally to be found 'bounding after him at the gait of Goethe's famous church bell in pursuit of the child truant from church'(78); it is the bell that tolls the imminent hour of Geoffrey's death, etc.

The quietness of the Mexican day is sometimes broken by a piercing voice: 'A corpse will be transported by express'(48, 286, 303). In silence Yvonne and Geoffrey watch the little cortege that accompanies a child's funeral, the members of which grotesquely play 'La Gucaracha' on their trumpets in order to exorcise the terror of death. (The same striving towards an acceptance of death and life as mutual aspects of the same concern is perhaps also demonstrated in the Mexican custom of making chocolate representations of skulls, skeletons and funeral wagons, which provides a contemporary interpretation of Aztec philosophy, where life and death were not to be separated.)

Yet the possibility of an escape into a new life, a 'vita nuova', to use Dante's term, is also frequently suggested in Under

the Volcano in the shape of 'signs'. The smoking of a cigarette, an 'Alas', provides a momentary relief yet it also embodies the possibility of escape in that in Spanish 'alas' means wings, and thus the wings suggest those of the eagle or the vulture. (However, in English the word 'alas' does not mean wings and thus Lowry ironically deflates the hope which the sign may have provided.) A somewhat more practical method of escape is suggested to Hugh and Yvonne (and a year later to Laruelle also) in the shape of the sign, 'Quahnahuac' (13), erected on the platform of the deserted railway station, and one which also leaps to the readers' eyes by nature of the fact that it is separated from the main text and enclosed by a frame. Jacques, just as Hugh had done a year earlier, imagines himself standing on the platform about to leave behind the restriction of the Quahnahuac scene; yet, although Laruelle is apparently about to leave Quahnahuac we do not actually evince him leaving; as such the sign becomes again ambiguous and the word 'Quahnahuac' in its restrictive frame may also suggest that the place itself holds people in its own closed boundaries without providing them with the opportunity for release.

The signs Lowry selects to which to draw attention, or rather, which are made to draw attention to themselves, in the Volcano tend to be able to be viewed in a highly ambiguous fashion; they frequently allow for the possibility of entirely conflicting interpretations to be placed upon them. Nevertheless, they all collectively function as a system of order, although largely an 'open' one, in that they are forever drawing together a large variety of strands of meaning from all parts of the text and, in essence, debating their validity.

SIGNS - NOTES

1. - Paul G. Tiessen, 'Malcolm Lowry and the Cinema', Canadian Literature, 44 (Spring, 1970), p.43.
2. - Daniel B. Dodson, Malcolm Lowry (New York and London, 1970), p.30.
3. - In that the inquisitive surgeons on the painting appear to foreshadow aspects of the inquisition Firmin undergoes in the Farolito from the police chiefs, they could be said to directly resemble some minor characters.
4. - In that the Consul is made to share many similarities with Christ, it is apposite that Lowry provides Geoffrey with the month of December in which to set his 're-birth'.
5. - In that Under the Volcano (at least the events of Chapters Two-Twelve) may be posited as the film Laruelle has made of the Consul's last day, as well as the day itself, Jacques as 'artist' does, in effect, become a 'murderer' in that his film ends with the Consul's murder. In Chapter Twelve Geoffrey momentarily thinks that the Chief of Rostrums looks like Laruelle and the Chief in fact 'shoots' the Consul.
6. - See Dante, The Divine Comedy: Hell. Canto III, translated by Dorothy L. Sayers (Harmondsworth, 1972).

COLOURS

Glory be to God for dappled things -  
 For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;  
 For rose-moles in all stipple upon trout that swim;

Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;  
 Landscape plotted and pieced - fold, fallow, and plough;  
 And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;  
 Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)  
 With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;

He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change;  
 Praise him.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'Pied Beauty'.

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shovelfuls';<sup>1</sup> nevertheless, as we read, we become almost immediately aware of the numerous colours the text throws out at us from nearly every page. Of course, as with much else in this dense novel, although the actual colours may indeed seem 'heaped on', they are rarely simply 'local'. That is to say, more often than not, they also operate on secondary, and even tertiary, levels of implied meaning and potential cross-reference. Ingeniously, throughout the book, Lowry is always qualifying (one of the primary ways in which the text operates is by means of qualification and re-qualification); he is always adding new material which refines, often obliquely, yet by its mere presence, on what has gone before: Bradbrook terms such a method 'the art of suggestion, of collocation without comment'.<sup>2</sup> In such a manner Lowry's colours readily find themselves having to become increasingly redefined or reinterpreted 'in different lights' far beyond their obvious usage as casual adjectives. For example, towards the end of his letter, the Consul alludes to 'a little red mail plane'(45) from which we can infer absolutely nothing (unless we recall that St. Exupéry's mail plane was also red) other than that the plane is red - it could have been any other colour (I am unaware that mail planes are invariably red) but Lowry, it seems, just fancied red. Reading on a few pages though, we come to realise that Lowry's choice of hue is anything but haphazard or whimsical. The aeroplane is now a 'minute red demon, winged emissary of Lucifer'(49) which appropriately ascends towards a 'brick-red horizon'(49) inhabited by vultures. Lowry invariably operates by means of association, thus always complicating any situation for the purposes of enhancing the reader's awareness - in this instance of both associative symbolism and implied form. Now

that we have more 'relevant' information on why Lowry employed red for the colour of his plane (death, Hell, Devil, etc.) our minds may turn back again to the close of Chapter One (in this way emulating the Ferris Wheel which revolves backwards at the same point) to recall the ascending 'red worms' floating up from the 'dead husk' (47) of the Consul's, by now, burnt missive, and thus newly assimilate reasons for why the 'worms' (earth, death?) should be 'red' (Hell?). Having correlated a little mental list of possible 'meanings' or implications for the colour red we may also wish to ponder upon why Yvonne, who in Chapter Two arrives by the said plane, is also rendered as wearing a preponderance of clothing in that colour. Similarly, a political pamphlet read by a fellow seaman on Hugh's ship, 'The Red Hand'(167), takes on infinitely more sinister proportions when our mental filing cabinet comes up with the blood-stained hands of Orlac; the 'red Cross ball'(101), which the Consul has attended, becomes increasingly redefined and structurally appropriate as the novel begins to dwell on such themes as Calvary, Christ's (and the Consul's) crucifixion, ritualistic blood-letting, etc. - Hugh hopes to set out to Spain (where Lowry could have been reminded, as well as reminding us, of Hemingway's Red Cross escapades) on a potentially bloody mission from Vera Cruz - the true cross.

As such, in much of Lowry's work, certainly throughout Under the Volcano, any possible traditional split between form and content becomes inexorably welded together; an awareness of hidden levels of meaning or repercussions of content only made truly accessible through the strategic appearance (in this case of colours, although the precept applies to a variety of the novel's

other paraphernalia too) of emblematic motifs, or to again employ the Wagnerian analogy, 'leitmotifs'.

Such potential systems of association are not confined to separate colours, most colours becoming redefined, and ultimately perhaps definable, by nature of an inter-dependence nurtured through comparison and contrast. For example, blue first materialises in the shape of a 'blue scarf of illegal smoke'(11); ten pages later Laruelle's scarf is rendered as 'blue' but also as 'polka-dotted'(21) i.e. with white spots. Already therefore, Lowry has sought to open up a minute aperture through which we can see possible links between white and blue. He later reinforces such suspicions in a variety of ways: the 'rolling blue ocean'(128) may lead us back to the 'white sea'(7) of the novel's first epigraph, and, significantly, at sea Hugh is aware of an officer changing his uniform from 'white to blue'(10); such maritime connections between the two colours become enhanced when a sign's 'faded blue letters' stand out from an 'oyster-white [my italics] adobe wall'(113). The sky as well as the sea offers Lowry the opportunity of coalescing the two colours: in the 'deep dark blue pure sky'(321) there emerges a solitary white star, whilst drifting clouds become, after much else, 'blue-white'(318).

Taking my above examples at face-value only, one could argue that, whilst indeed there are 'design-governing postures',<sup>3</sup> as Lowry himself termed them, operating throughout Under the Volcano, that they seek not to clarify the reader's picture of any larger concerns but ultimately simply draw attention to the author's own

peculiar brand of meretricious gamesmanship; and indeed, whilst I would agree that this is **in** part the case it is not wholly so: blue and white merged enforce themselves as metaphors for escape and salvation (see below) thereby acting in vital antithesis to the merged reds and blacks, colours of restriction and damnation.

What have been defined as the 'primal opposites'<sup>4</sup> with which Lowry consistently operates find their way into his novel's colour scheme in his insistence on black and white. 'White' outnumbers any other colour in the book with its eighty-five appearances, and 'black' follows closely on with seventy-eight. Indeed the novel's first 'white' is ~~the~~ only colour employed in the three epigraphs, in the shape of the 'white sea'(7), thus perhaps already constituting a foundation stone of sorts for a massive spanning link to Lowry's projected, but destroyed, Paradiso of the Modern Divine Comedy - In Ballast to the White Sea: it is also the first colour to be used in the book proper, where, on the very first page, it is used to describe the 'flannels'(9) of the two tennis players, Vigil and Laruelle. Conversely, the final colour Lowry employs in his text is black in the shape of 'black spouts of villages catapulted into space'(375); furthermore, just before the end, Lowry uses black twice, and with an emphatic capital letter, when the Chief of Rostrums vehemently repeats the first syllable of Firmin's assumed name (Blackstone): 'You say your name is Black. No es Black'(371). Perhaps Lowry intends us to speculate on the notion that, if the Consul 'no es' black, then he is perhaps 'white'; or, in other words, even at this late stage of the novel his precise moral shading is still

ambiguous. Throughout Under the Volcano Lowry charts a meticulous colour spectrum employing the two vital antitheses of Black and White as his guidelines.

Within the framework of Lowry's infernal paradise dialectic, the colours black and white are frequently employed to describe or underline aspects of the natural world which are metaphorically to be regarded as either 'black'(infernal) or 'white'(paradisal). White suggests the heavens and implies ascent: the 'white capped ranges'(129) in the distance, the snow of the 'White Alps'(82), the 'white stars'(271) of the night sky; it also describes salvation and sanctuary: a 'white church'(255), a 'white beautiful cathedral city'(303), a 'sanctuary whose white and embellished steeples'(301) rise into the sky. On the other hand black evokes the earth, and more specifically an underground world, or hell. The turbulent infernal volcanic terrain itself announces relevant associations when, on the bus journey to Tomalin, Hugh observes 'Nothing but pines, fircones, stones, black earth. Yet that earth looked parched, those stones, unmistakably, volcanic'(241). Two underground substances: coal and carbon, are also often invoked - 'black carbon'(62), 'coal dust, black bituminous'(284); strategic 'terrain' already instigated in the 'ugly black stumps'(23) of Leasowe's antediluvian forest. Lowry furthers his series of black's infernal analogies when he connects the colour with fire: a ruined church 'Burned, perhaps, in the revolution, its exterior was blackened with fire, and it had an air of being damned'(242); in his day-dream at the Salon Ofelia, the Consul recalls a steam train emitting a 'frightful spouting, and spiralling of black smoke'(284) going, significantly, 'downhill'(284) and this image

foreshadows the novel's final use of the colour with the world itself in eruption 'bursting into black spouts of villages catapulted into space'(375). Moreover, the Consul, in his reminiscence of the s.s.Samaritan, in the furnaces of which he may have consigned some German submarine officers, renders the ship's hull as having a 'black entrance'(188). Lowry makes further elaboration and clarification of his black = damnation equation with his strategic references to black magicians, of which the Consul may be one, the 'black goat'(235), an implicitly infernal beast and archetypal symbol for both the devil and the evil necromancer, and also in the 'black words on the sign' proclaiming 'LE GUSTA ESTE JARDIN'(132). As the day develops there is a gradual transformation from white to black in many objects as the ominous end draws forever nearer, and this is perhaps best demonstrated if we look at the way the clouds are described: white clouds become mentioned six times up until page 128, whilst from page 278 onwards the clouds are described as 'black' six times. The clouds, as such, are not threatening yet when Lowry renders them 'black', the colour, with its inherent associations, comes to 'label' them for us.

As mentioned earlier, throughout Under the Volcano Lowry contrasts the merged colours -red and black - with the hues blue and white to strengthen his infernal/paradisaal dialectic. As Yvonne thinks of her northern paradise she conceives of the 'mountains, still white with snow appearing sharp and clear against the blue sky, and blue wood-smoke from the driftwood fire curling out of the chimney'(272);<sup>5</sup> earlier on the road to Tomalin, after an interlude in which everybody seems happy and the trip appears the

'best of all possible ideas'(239), the bus passes 'bright blue flowers [which] climbed right up into the trees that were already snowy with blooms'(239); as Hugh and Yvonne stare into the sky on their way to Parian, they see that the 'clouds, no longer red, had become a peculiar luminous blue-white'(318). (In Gargantua and Pantagruel, Rabelais devotes a chapter to the significance of the colours white and blue writing, at its conclusion, that 'of course blue signifies heaven and heavenly things, by the same symbolism that makes white stand for joy and pleasure.')

<sup>6</sup> In contrast, when the Consul enters the gloomy El Bosque he encounters Senora Gregorio 'wearing an unusually long and shabby rustling black dress' and notices that her hair has been 'dyed red'(229); at Tomalin, as hopes of an escape with Geoffrey begin to fade, Yvonne sees 'black clouds climbing the sky' and a little later is made to observe that 'dust ... and dung [had been] in [the bull's] red eyes'(278); as she dies, and simultaneously metaphorically ignites her vision, Yvonne 'sees' that 'the flowers in the garden were blackened and burning' and that 'the red door, the casement windows, the curtains she'd made were burning'(336); in the depths of the Farolito Lowry says that 'the floor was red flagstone' and then employs the metaphor of the Consul 'sinking into a sea' against 'a desolate horizon with one huge black sailing ship, hull down, sweeping into the sunset'(349). In his Mexican novel, The Plumed Serpent, D.H. Lawrence attributes significantly-coloured robes to the two priests who represent the gods Quetzalcoatl and Huitzilopochtli, the former god is depicted by blue and white attire, the latter by red and black, although both robes contain elements of the other colours as well, thus, as in Lowry, suggesting the potential for coalescence. Moreover, although it is something of a reductive

claim, one could argue that Quetzalcoatl is fundamentally the 'good' god (blue and white) whilst Huitzilopochtli manifests a more negative, and perhaps even 'evil' aspect.<sup>7</sup> At the arena:

Yvonne felt a moment, they were in Mexico again for the first time; there was that same warm poignant happy sense, indefinable, illogically, of sorrow that would be overcome, of hope ... above all of hope, of the future -

A smiling, bearded giant, a white serape decorated with cobalt dragons flung over his shoulder, proclaimed it. (256)

Many commentators have drawn attention towards, and subsequently analysed, Lowry's use of a sea metaphor throughout Under the Volcano. Within a generally maritime context, a context which pervades his novel, Lowry frequently makes use of the colour blue to describe his expansive oceans, and also to signal the presence of an external freedom operating outside the boundaries of the claustrophobic atmosphere of Quahnahuac and its immediate surroundings: such is the case in the 'blue water' (42) predominant in the nostalgic section of the Consul's letter; in the 'rolling blue ocean' Hugh envisages lying 'beyond the expanse of plains and beyond the volcanoes' (128); in the 'blue and cold sea' (271) which Yvonne places adjacent to her northern dreamland. (In Mexico, on the Day of the Dead itself, the blue swimming pool in the centre of the Consul's festering garden offers an opportunity for oblivious immersion on a less grandiose, and appropriately 'restricted' scale). The escapist, and subsequently paradisaical, attributes of the colour blue become further highlighted and extended when Lowry uses the colour, especially in the earlier stages of the narrative, to describe the sky as well as the sea



(one necessarily, and also conveniently for Lowry's cosmological scheme, mirroring the other), and thus the colour itself becomes inexorably connected with the omnipresent ascent theme. In the happy atmosphere of Chapter Four, Lowry informs us that the 'sky was blue'(129) and the blue sky materialises another four or five times in the novel to represent an example of a kind of idyllic constant; a constant, nonetheless, which is still likely to be ironised by surrounding events, for example, at the end of Chapter Eight, Lowry writes that 'in the blue sky above them [the protagonists], floated, the vultures'(255), the birds' inherent 'blackness' contradicting and deflating the paradisaal blue of their background; later, as Hugh, Yvonne and the Consul leave the bull ring, the sky is once more depicted as 'blue again as they went down [my italics] into Tomalin; dark [my italics] clouds still gathered behind Popocatepetl(280), and again 'infernal' elements are juxtaposed against a potentially happy or tranquil background thus, in effect, cancelling it.

Even blue though cannot, it seems, escape becoming itself negatively endowed as the novel draws towards its end. Ominous foreboding is already offered at the Arena Tomalin itself where the sky becomes an 'abyssmal [my italics] blue'(257); in the Farolito the Consul assumes a 'blue expression peculiar to a certain type of drunkard'(341); the 'blue electric bulb'(349) casts a 'dim blue light'(352) in one of the bar's dingy back rooms (and one is perhaps reminded of the 'dim, electric light'(40) of Bustamente cinema, that Ur-Farolito; interestingly also, Vigil compares the Consul's bodily system to the same state of 'decompuesto' which pervades the cine, whilst in the Farolito, at the end of the day, Firmin

himself is at his most 'decomposed'); finally, the novel's last rendition of blue concerns the colour of a packet of cigarettes: the significantly and poignantly named 'Alas'(362) - alas, for Firmin, the wings depicted on the cigarette packet prove insufficient to transport him heavenwards.

Lowry employs a similar colour pun with blue as he does with his golf 'green' with his references to the musical 'blues' (16, 168, 181). When, in Chapter One, Laruelle crosses the fields from the Casino to approach the town of Quahnahuac itself 'A despondent American tune, the St. Louis Blues [is] borne across the fields to him'(16) and, in a sense, the music acts as a kind of threnody or elegy for the Consul himself (later in the Chapter Bustamente terms Firmin 'the one with blue eyes' and then calls him 'The Americano'(34).) Sandwiched between the above two blue references is one to 'a faded blue Ford, a total wreck [which] had been pushed beneath a hedge on a slope: two bricks had been set under its front wheels against involuntary departure'(19). The Consul's blue eyes/blues connections may assist in suggesting that the blue Ford was in fact his car (when asked by Yvonne in Chapter Two what has happened to the car Geoffrey replies: 'As a matter of fact I've lost it'(57)): blue as the colour of aspiration and escape is further manipulated in this context, for the car, a total wreck, is a faded blue to suggest the potential escape route it may once have provided has now also faded (notice also that it stands on a slope but can rise no farther).<sup>8</sup> In Chapter Seven, the Consul passes his old 'closed British Consulate ... the faded blue shield regard[ing] him mournfully'(223); again aspirations, this

time perhaps of security, normality, position, etc., have again faded in that the Consulate has now closed down and the Consul is left a pariah or outcast in the community which once respected him.

Of the thirty-four appearances of red in the novel, Lowry is much more diffuse in his intentions and does not clearly categorize the colour by attributing to it only one or two connotations; instead, he allows it to assume a variety of inherent undercurrents. Fire is one of his main concerns when bringing the colour into play, as in the Consul's heart burning 'so fiercely with the fires of hell a bar of red-hot iron is a mere chill to it' (35) or in the metaphorical 'red blaze' (317) of the ominous evening sky. (In the infernal context red also merges with black and both together become evocative of hell and damnation.) Red's hellish (infernal) aspects are further invoked when the protagonists encounter 'apparently the devil himself, with a huge dark red face and horns' (235); earlier, whilst lying prone in the road, the Consul has had a fellow Englishman come to his rescue who is rendered as having a 'red merry face which became a shade redder' (85); in that the Englishman gives Geoffrey a drink, and assists him to resume his 'Faustian' quest, perhaps Lowry provides him with a red face so that he can become unwittingly identified with the devil. Red is made equally sinister, foreboding, death-like, etc., in a variety of other contexts too, for example, in the 'dull red concoction' (73) that is Geoffrey's strychnine mixture, or in the 'blood-red snow' (318) on the summits of the volcanoes.

Within the general context of Lowry's Mexican world of Under the Volcano, teeming with plant life of all different kinds, he often, as one might expect, uses the colour green to give an impression of the general fecundity and richness of his frequently overgrown floral setting. Lowry, however, contrasts the healthy 'spring green'(235), the 'freshness [of] green trees shot by evening sunlight'(15)<sup>9</sup> with objects which he makes green because they are, either literally or metaphorically, rotten or decaying, for example: in the deserted Borda gardens the pool is 'covered with green scum'(20); in the Consul's garden a flower bed is 'completely, grossly strangled by a coarse green vine'(102); the Consul's vision of a lake turns out to be of 'a broken greenhouse roof belonging to El Jardin Xicotancatl: only weeds lived in the greenhouse'(281). As such, as is indeed the case with most of the other colours Lowry employs, with the possible exceptions of black and white, the colour green too becomes gradually revealed as inherently ambiguous; as presenting conflicting facets of itself within a generally related context - the plant kingdom - depending on which aspect Lowry wishes to draw our attention. In terms of Lowry's natural world representing an infernal paradise, then it is, of course, highly appropriate that green, the colour of the natural world, should also continuously be vacillating. In his garden the Consul has a 'green rocking chair'(75): appropriately, within the larger garden context of Under the Volcano in general, the colour green too could be said to rock between opposing values.

In Chapter One, Laruelle observes 'soldiers, wearing French army helmets and grey faded purple uniforms [see 'purple' below] laced and interlaced with green lariats'(29), whilst at the Farolito the

Consul too sees 'a group of soldiers talking, their bugles slung over their shoulders with bright green lariats'(340): perhaps the inclusion of an element of green in the soldiers' uniforms reflects the fact that they are, in a sense, guarding the 'garden' state 'of the Earthly Paradise itself'(16), waiting, in effect, to evict those who destroy. A 'lariat' is a type of small lasso and at the Farolito the Consul too could be said to be finally caught or lassoed, just as the bull (an overt animal symbol for Firmin) is also lassoed in the arena.<sup>10</sup>

In the centre of the novel, at Laruelle's, the Consul has some thoughts both of the local Quahnahuac golf-course, as well as about a golf-course of his own invention which he imagines stretching out to Parian. Lowry makes some slight word play when he alludes to golf greens, introduced when the Consul initially makes out 'a green corner, the golf course'(200). Firmin's desire 'to see ... far below, resting near the pin on the green, his Silver King'(207) golf ball in a way suggests a quest for a green or natural world where he can lose himself in his own thoughts, in a sort of 'green corner'. Geoffrey's interest in Rousseau; the fact that his garden is like a jungle; the idea of going off to live amongst the Indians like his hero William Blackstone, are all elements which suggest his search for 'the green'. Of course, Geoffrey does not attain his green world because he finds himself flung into the abyss; similarly, on the Leasowe golf-course, his ball too did not often make the green but became trapped in the Hell Bunker.

As is the case with 'blue', the colour purple is also given paradisaical connotations: on his last walk through the town

Laruelle sees the 'purple hills of a Dore Paradise slop[ing] away into the distance'(11); later, he notices 'purple mountains all around him'(19); on their idyllic ride in Chapter Four Hugh and Yvonne are also made aware of the 'purple hills'(102) and 'purple slopes'(103) of their immediate surroundings. Nevertheless, as the novel progresses, the colour purple too comes to occupy a somewhat more ambiguous stance within Lowry's ever-darkening pattern. By Chapter Eleven the 'elevated' paradisaical associations of the colour have faded somewhat and the 'low hills' become 'purple and sad'(318) - the hills now being rendered as 'low' to demonstrate aspiration also gradually having failed or subsided. Indeed, as would seem true of some other shades as well, purple becomes an increasingly negatively associated colour as the narrative draws towards its conclusion: at one point the threatening 'dark clouds' behind Popocatepetl become 'purple masses'(280); in its last appearance in the text it becomes the colour used, together with black, to describe the corn stops eaten by the rabbit the Consul sees, or thinks he sees, in the Farolito.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, it may be feasible to pin-point Lowry's transformation of purple from an affirmative to a negative colour: such a metamorphosis possibly occurs, as do many other metamorphoses, at Laruelle's half-way house where the towers are described 'as if camouflaged (almost like the Samaritan, in fact): blue, grey purple, vermillion'(198); not only does the purple not stand out here, as it is suggested it has become subsumed by the other colours, but also, 'from a short distance', the general effect becomes one of a 'uniform dull mauve'(198). This above phrase may serve to take us back to the 'grey faded purple uniforms'(29) of the soldiers on sentry duty glimpsed by Laruelle on his walk in Chapter One; furthermore, both phrases

introduce and help to reinforce, albeit in a minor way, a picture of a violent military regime operating a 'police' state. Lowry later enhances such an impression by means of his strategic colour employment when, in Chapter Eight, firstly, the pelado is rendered as wearing a 'handsome purple shirt'(237), and secondly, when the other men on the bus are also described as wearing 'purple shirts'(240); and these become the same 'men in the purple shirts, who'd had a good look at what was going on, yet hadn't stirred from the bus'(251). Through his subtle subsequent use of the colour Lowry strengthens or reinforces our 'suspicions' of the pelado, and possibly of the other men too, when, in the following chapter, Yvonne remembers some of her nightmarish moments in a large city, seeing: 'Hoodlums with wide purple trousers [waiting] where the icy gale streamed into open parlours'(267): appropriately, the very next sentence chronicles the 'darkness of a world without meaning, a world without aim'(267).

On another level the 'ambivalence' of purple could have another thematic ramification as the possible colour for the robe of a major adept who may again (possibly) be the Consul himself, although Lowry only really provides us with a half-clue as to why this should be so when Geoffrey informs Yvonne that Hugh had arrived to see him 'looking like Hoot S. Hart in the Riders to the Purple Sage'(65): in Chapter Four, both Yvonne and Hugh become 'riders' and both have also come 'to' the Consul who himself may perhaps thus be made synonymous in a way, to a purple sage. (Julien Tondrián notes that 'Swedenborg's "vision" which took place on April 7, 1744 was of a Magus clothed in purple revealing all the secrets to him'.)<sup>12</sup>

Much of the action of Under the Volcano takes place outdoors in the bright sunlit world Mexican landscape; however, the colour yellow is, perhaps surprisingly, not one often utilised in Lowry's treatment. It appears only fourteen times in the book, and only its first appearance links it with sunlight: 'a lake of yellow sunlight appeared in the distance'(15). As is the case with 'purple', yellow too is made to take on increasingly sinister or foreboding overtones as the novel progresses. The strange (demonic?) insecticide, '666', is everywhere advertised on 'obscure yellow tin plates'(192) and this detail of description may perhaps serve to take us back to the 'glutinous yellow substance for trapping insects'(144), carafes of which hang from the Consul's pear trees. If the fruit (the pear) becomes regarded, as it perhaps should be within the framework of yet another section of Lowry's vast machinery of mythic manipulation, as the forbidden fruit of Eden, then Lowry would seem to wish to imply that insects drawn towards it will suffer death and (666) 'damnation'. Many of the novel's insects, of course, are also overt symbols for the Consul himself; he is especially comparable to the scorpion, for stinging himself to death with drink, he in a sense emulates the manner in which a scorpion can sting itself to death with its own poison; furthermore, he mentally projects himself onto the golf-course as a 'Golfing scorpion'(200).<sup>13</sup> Even Yvonne's 'paradisal' vision of her idyllic little house by the sea becomes implicitly undermined by the potential equation Lowry has set up of the Consul being ineluctably drawn to the forbidden fruit as are insects by the colour yellow - here the 'yellow light of the lamps'(271) in the evening would undoubtedly attract insects and, in the very next phrase, Lowry describes a 'crab-apple tree [my italics] half support[ing] the open



sunny platform where the Consul would work'(271); significantly, the first constellation Yvonne imagines herself and the Consul seeing in the night sky of the northern dream-scape is 'Scorpio' (271).<sup>14</sup>

In the earlier parts of the Volcano, yellow is often used to draw attention to the brightness of Yvonne's apparel. Three times her slacks (98, 102, 190) are so described, and once, her sandals (102). Lowry possibly intends a mnemonic equation - Yvonne for yellow (in a similar way, Geoff is often grey, although I cannot locate similar parallels for either Hugh or Jacques, equi-distantly poised, as I noted above, between white and black; at various stages he could also be described as 'green' - note his green rocking chair, his golf green musings and the analogy 'bottle-green'(143)). In terms of Yvonne, her yellow outfit may represent cowardice of sorts, as, in the earlier part of the day especially, she is often reticent and frightened to make decisions, advances, etc.; thus when ~~she~~ changes into her 'white tailored sharkskin suit'(190), encountering her: 'One would not have noticed lack of faith, nor questioned that she knew where she was going'(191).

In the piercing 'yellow eyes'(288) of Cervantes' cockerel, in the 'yellow flickering'(290) of a sacramental candle, and in the 'yellow hands'(352) which seem to clap themselves onto Geoffrey's face, Lowry seems to give the colour virtually evil connotations. There are also implicit religious overtones: the cock must crow three times; the hands could be metaphorically those of Pilate which, though washed, are still unclean; and perhaps Lowry also had in mind Gauguin's famous painting The Yellow Christ which depicts the

crucifixion occurring (as does the Consul's murder) with sundry onlookers apparently taking little interest in the event.

Significantly, at the final chronological point of Under the Volcano, at the close of Chapter One, Lowry provides us with a metaphorical rendition of an after-death state (for the cyclically-minded Lowry - the Ferris wheel here revolves backwards - the concept of 'dust to dust', ashes to ashes' fits quite well) when Laruelle sets fire to the Consul's letter. The fire both foreshadows (and recapitulates upon) the gunfire of Firmin's murder as well as the fire in Yvonne's dying vision (and thus also casts a sly reference towards Indic burial rites where wives are cremated with their dead husbands); appropriately, in his mention of 'worms' and 'grey wisps of ashes' becoming a 'dead husk'(47), Lowry is simultaneously able to anticipate the two oncoming deaths as well as provide them with a sort of readymade post-mortem.

Grey dust and ashes mentioned throughout the narrative provide the opportunity for elegant variations on the related themes of collapse, corrosion, death and decay. Yvonne's face 'could collapse ... like a heap of ashes, and be grey'(77), and, ingeniously, a few pages later, an ash-tray itself is described as a 'tall grey tin-work'(89). At the close of the ninth chapter, the 'old, lame Indian' carrying an even older, and presumably dying, Indian on his back, by means of a 'strap looped over his forehead' shuffles off with his mortal coil 'through the grey, white dust'(282) and Lowry terminates a relatively happy interlude with yet another series of foreboding omens. The 'grey dunes'(15) of Cheshire, recalled in Chapter One by Laruelle, perhaps also have an

Ur-dust connotation within the larger cyclical framework of the form of Lowry's novel - that from which everything rises and into which everything will subside. Significantly, the Hell Bunker too contains grey sand (out of which the Consul 'rises' after having been discovered by Laruelle), and thus the barranca which offers a post-death state for the Consul, and into which he will 'fall', may also be considered, in the context of Lowry's construction, as metaphorically grey; indeed, equating grey with death, as he does, Lowry enhances the scope of his 'ordering' system.<sup>15</sup> (As Kristofer Dorosz perceptively remarks, in Under the Volcano: 'Words tend to have a connotative rather than a denotative function';<sup>16</sup> moreover, one could say that this statement holds especially true when the words are colours with which Lowry plays his games of association. After his perceptive statement Dorosz destroys his point somewhat by saying that these words 'are often, so to speak, hurled at the reader rather than organized in an orderly sequence':<sup>17</sup> if we again, in this context, substitute 'colours' for words in general then one might agree that they are, so to speak, hurled at the reader, yet if the reader examines the text closely enough, or 'reads' it closely, then he may find that they are also organized in a highly orderly series of interlocking sequences.)

Grey again announces death when the Consul, Hugh and Yvonne walk towards the town (and their surprise encounter with Laruelle) passing 'grey tombstones' and a school playground with a 'swing like a gallows'(191). Such associations of grey with the tomb are returned to at the Salon Ofelia where the Consul finds himself immured in the toilet which was 'all of grey stone, and

looked like a tomb'(295); on the following page the Consul considers the lavatory as a 'grey final Consulate'(296).<sup>18</sup> At the Farolito, Firmin conceives of the impossibility of a reconciliation with Yvonne, and thus also of a move to her dreamland, which he terms a 'little grey home in the west'(354); ironically, because he and Yvonne cannot become united, Geoffrey's imminent death provides him with a 'grey home' of sorts anyway in the shape of the grave.<sup>19</sup>

More often than not, brown is used to render skin and hair colour, especially in the cases of Yvonne and Hugh. Ironically, although the Consul has been in tropical Mexico much longer than they, he is of an implicitly paler complexion than either his ex-wife - 'Brown as a berry'(76) - or his half-brother, whose skin appears almost 'more black than brown'(99). Lowry perhaps wishes us to infer that Geoffrey has spent most of his time cooped up inside dark cantinas; certainly, in comparison to his two younger 'colleagues', Firmin would not appear to be a typical outdoor type. In the morning the Consul thinks of Yvonne as 'bronzed and youthful and ageless'(77), whilst his own unhealthy lifestyle appears to add to the impression, perhaps sensed throughout the Volcano, that the Consul 'seems' more than twelve years older than Hugh and Yvonne. As 'brown', Hugh and Yvonne become, in a way, identifiable with the native Mexicans themselves: two farmers are briefly described mainly only in terms of 'their brown hands trac[ing] patterns in the air'(320; within such a scenario, the whiter Consul becomes an outsider of sorts even within his own 'family', just as he is already an outsider in Mexico itself.

The novel's lesser used colours tend, in the main, to be less common hues than the blacks, whites, reds, blues, greens, yellows, browns, greys, etc. to which the novelist has recourse to return constantly in his process of constructing associative patterns and frameworks. Most of the lesser employed colours of Under the Volcano tend to be included, it would appear, mainly for a single effect; and such might be the case with a 'ruby shimmer' (290), a 'lilac-shaded dawn' (352) or an 'amber glow' (143), where the colours seem to perform a purely adjectival function. Already though, Mr Quincey's 'khaki shirt' (135) may serve, if only, 'whimsically', to hint at the uniform of war, especially as the Consul comes across him at 'close quarters' (135) guarding the border of his territory, whilst the 'maroon leather cover' (40) of the book of Elizabethan plays, including Doctor Faustus, may perhaps signify the colour of dried blood by then a year old? In Chapter Two, Lowry uses the word scarlet, only twice, although on the same page, and possibly to good effect, when he, firstly, describes an advertisement showing a picture of 'a woman wearing a scarlet brassière lying on a scrolled divan' (51), and then, slightly later, renders Yvonne in a coquettish pose 'with one hand thrust through the handle of her scarlet bag resting on her hip' (51) - perhaps Lowry intends us to make the equation that Yvonne is in some way a 'scarlet' woman.<sup>20</sup> When Hugh arrives and finds himself unconsciously watching and admiring Yvonne, she is described as standing with 'vivid scarlet flowers behind her' (102). (It is perhaps relevant that the word 'colourless' is used only twice in Under the Volcano, on both occasions being applied to mescal, for all colours, in a way, become subsumed by the

lethal liquid which, for Geoffrey, reduces the colourful world to a sort of blank void.)

The Volcano's colours are of vital importance in that Lowry employs them as a method or means by which he suggests patterns of association: whether or not these patterns are consciously or unconsciously explored by the reader, I believe they, nevertheless, allow for an ordering system to once again emerge somewhere across the course; again one defined by Lowry's general parameters but ~~also~~ assimilated only in terms of the competence of one's personal play.

## COLOURS - NOTES

1. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters (London, 1967), p.61.
2. - M.C. Bradbrook, Malcolm Lowry: His Art and Early Life. a study in transformation (Cambridge, 1974), p.67.
3. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.143.
4. - Tony Kilgallin, Lowry (Erin, Ontario), p.200.
5. - Yvonne's thoughts about the 'blue wood-smoke from the driftwood fire take place at Tomalin, whilst, in Chapter One, Laruelle makes out 'the village of Tomalin, nestling behind the jungle, from which rose a thin blue scarf of illegal smoke'(11).
6. - See Rabelais, Gargantua and Pantagruel, trans. J.M. Cohen (Harmondsworth, 1981), p.62.
7. - See D.H. Lawrence, The Plumed Serpent [1926] rep. Penguin (Harmondsworth, 1976), pp.336-37.
8. - Earlier in this study I discussed Lowry's use of the myth of Sisyphus. Perhaps it is worth noting that the car described in Chapter One is itself in, what might be termed, a Sisyphian predicament, its wheels being constantly held on a slope by two bricks (stones).
9. - Earlier I suggested that the Consul is frequently symbolised by a tree: in that, at the end of his life, he is shot in the evening this piece of description again serves to foreshadow his fate. As a potential pagan harvest sacrifice action, at least within Lowry's scheme if not within that of his murderers, then the Consul's death could also, in a sense, be said to have worked in that the parched and sterile land has now returned to its freshness and greenery.
10. - In that a lariat is a type of coil or lasso, Lowry provides yet another little circle or loop with which he metaphorically connects the soldiers and lariats of Chapter One with the soldiers and their lariats of Chapter Twelve.
11. - The reason why these corn stops become implicitly sinister is because the Consul is himself soon to have to adopt the role of a corn doll, traditionally ignited by being flung on a bed of red-hot coals. (In that the Consul may have consigned the German officers to the red-hot coals of the Samaritan's furnaces he is, metaphorically at least, given an appropriate punishment.)
12. - See Julian Tondrian, Occultism: Secrets of a Hidden World (Verviers, Belgium, 1968, trans. London, 1972), p.168.

13. - In his brief analysis of the Consul being labelled an 'espider' by the Chief of Rostrums, Markson points out that Firmin 'might be viewed as becoming a sort of metaphorical "insect" ... much in the manner of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*'. See David Markson, Malcolm Lowry's Volcano: Myth, Symbol Meaning (New York, 1978), p.209.
14. - With the assistance of his strategic colour employment, Lowry has enhanced one of his novel's major themes, his point being that Inferno and Paradiso cannot be simply allocated the landscapes pertaining to either Mexican 'reality' or Canadian 'dream-scape: just as Mexico can be paradisaal, so Canada can also be infernal (one thinks of Lowry's own Dollarton shack which overlooked the sign of a massive 'SHELL' refinery with the 'S' missing).
15. - In his day-dream at the Salon Ofelia, the Consul envisages (remembers) sitting in a station waiting-room opposite a man 'in a dirty grey suit, and trousers baggy at the knees, with one bicycle clip, in his long, long baggy grey jacket, and grey cloth cap' and, a moment later, renders an 'adjacent cemetery', a 'gravedigger' and 'his special tools of death'(285). Throughout Under the Volcano the train is also associated with death, the very first words to be heard on the Day of the Dead, 1938, concerning a corpse transported by express.
16. - Kristofer Dorosz, Malcolm Lowry's Infernal Paradise (Uppsala, 1976), p.68.
17. - *ibid.*, p.68.
18. - In that the Consul repeatedly asks for a 'stone'(295), and, in that Hugh and Yvonne 'wait for the fish that dies'(293), Geoffrey's grey cell is perhaps also to be regarded as an evocation of Christ's tomb. Certainly the meal the three have at the Ofelia is made to become a 'last supper'.
19. - In his potential desire for isolation and mystical transcendence of sorts, Geoffrey's goal is in an easterly direction, thus he shirks the idea of a normal loving reunion with Yvonne 'in the west'.
20. - This little cameo, with scarlet (blood-coloured?) bag which Lowry describes resting on hip, serves to ingeniously connect Yvonne with the horse which is ultimately to bring about her 'downfall', for it possesses 'a sore on its hipbone'(249).



NUMBERS

Dear Mr. Bray,

Can you perhaps make use in your NUMBERS project, of, for example, the Oxford English Dictionary's definition 111 186 of that term ('Metrical periods or feet; hence lines, verses')? Or the Kabbalistic tradition that the Torah was a Septateuch before it became a pentateuch, one of its original books having gone the way of the 10 lost tribes, another shrunk to 2 verses in the Book of Numbers? Or the consideration (which occurred to me on receipt of your letter of July 8) that NUMBERS is a 7-letter word arranged symmetrically about your initial; that its 5th letter, or Phi-point, is also the 5th of the alphabet; that even more things in the world come in 7's than come in 5's; that by perfectly imitating the pattern of mythic heroism one may become not a mythic hero but merely a perfect imitation; that one might cunningly aspire neither to perfect nor to revolutionize the flawed genre of the Novel, say, but to imitate perfectly its flaws?

Barth, Letters

In his letter to Cape, Lowry himself draws attention to the importance that two numbers in particular have in his novel.

Initially, discussing the fact that Under the Volcano is divided into twelve sections, he writes:

The twelve chapters should be considered as twelve blocks, to each of which I have devoted over a period of years a great deal of labour, and I hope to convince you that whatever cuts may be made there must still be twelve chapters. Each Chapter is a unity in itself and all are related and interrelated. Twelve is a universal unit. To say nothing of the twelve labours of Hercules, there are 12 hours in a day, and the book is concerned with a single day as well as, though very incidentally, with time: there are 12 months in a year, and the novel is enclosed by a year; while the deeply buried layer of the novel or poem that attaches itself to myth, does so to the Jewish Cabbala where the number 12 is of the highest symbolic importance. <sup>1</sup>

Later, discussing Chapter Seven, he says:

Here we come to seven, the fateful, the magic, the lucky good-bad number and the scene in the tower, where I write this letter. By a coincidence I moved to the tower on January 7 ... my house burned down on June 7; when I returned to the burned site someone had branded, for some reason, the number 7 on a burned tree; why was I not a philosopher? <sup>2</sup>

From the two above extracts from Lowry's letter to Cape, it becomes obvious which two numbers he has selected for special treatment. Yet Lowry also tells us why his numbers again become, so to speak, motifs, for like much else they are also inherently made to accrue and subsequently generate complex patterns of associations or correspondences with each of their reappearances. By noticing and observing that Under the Volcano possesses twelve chapters, for example, every time the number twelve itself appears in the novel we are subconsciously reminded of the book's structure. On the other hand, in the context of the novel itself (irrespective of external

connotations) the number seven becomes 'fateful', essentially by nature of its connections with the white horse, itself a fateful vehicle.<sup>3</sup> By constantly dwelling on his two central numbers (with one notable exception - see below - they are the digits referred to more than any others in the text), Lowry obliquely draws attention to their presence or impingement upon his action, and thus once more imbues them with 'meanings'. By also invoking age-old and well-known units which traditionally comprise seven or twelve components, for example, the wonders of the ancient world or the apostles (see below), Lowry further enlarges his framework of association, and thus again draws attention to the potential organisational efficacy which his motifs possess; he further accentuates the prominence of the numbers by making Chapters Seven and Twelve the two longest (and perhaps one could argue the most 'important') of his novel.<sup>4</sup> The numbers seven and twelve both combine the tetrad and the triad (four and three) and Lowry has this combination present at the opening of his novel, when he draws attention to the tennis racket presses of Vigil and Laruelle: 'the doctor's triangular, the other's quadrangular'(10). Elsewhere also in the book, the numbers three and four appear in conjunction: at Laruelle's the Consul comes across '34'(212) in the telephone directory which brings him out in a cold sweat (and it is perhaps 'appropriate' it should, for the number is that of Zusugoitea, the Chief of Rostrums, who later in the day, at seven, is the man who shoots Geoffrey). In that threes and fours together, and indeed the numbers 34 or 43, appear at various strategically apt stages of his narrative,<sup>5</sup> Lowry both extends the scope of his arithmetical game, as well as once more pointing to the pre-eminence of his related central numbers by dwelling on

their factors.

By selecting seven as a vital number in his scheme, Lowry implicitly alludes to the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, some of which at least seem to appear, in a modified way, in his text anyway: the Hanging Gardens of Babylon have an analogue in the many gardens of the Volcano, especially the Consul's; the Pharos of Alexandria becomes suggested in the Farolito, the 'little lighthouse'; the Egyptian pyramids are replaced by the Aztec pyramids at Cholula and Tenochtitlan. Lowry broadens his field of reference to certain Aztec myths in terms of the number when he possibly alludes to the belief that man passes through seven palaces on the way to either heaven or hell: in the Farolito the Chief of Rostrums says to the Consul: 'You have murdered a man and escaped through seven states'(358), and in fact, since leaving his house at the end of Chapter Six (i.e. just before the commencement of the seventh chapter), the Consul is to be encountered at seven different locations: Laruelle's, the fairground, the cantina El Bosque, the bus, the arena, the Salon Ofelia, and the Farolito, thus, in a way, having passed through seven states. In ancient times, at least, there were seven heavenly bodies: five planets and the sun and moon, the moon being the seventh 'planet'. In Chapter Three, the Consul and Yvonne discuss the differences between the Copernican and the Mayan astronomical systems and the Consul goes on to list the names of seven Mayan months. Furthermore, it may not be merely coincidental that the moon is the seventh of the heavenly spheres and that the Consul dies at seven o'clock, just after the sun has set and the moon has risen: the 2nd November, 1938 also fell on a Monday - the moon's day. As she watches the moon, in Chapter Eleven, Yvonne thinks

of it as 'the dead child of the earth'(323), her own dead child, like the now virtually dead Consul, also being named Geoffrey. Seven becomes further manipulated in Under the Volcano, in an astronomical context, when Lowry refers to the Pleiades or seven sisters - the word 'Pleiades'(337) forms the last word of Chapter Eleven: chronologically, it is seven o'clock and both the Consul and Yvonne have been killed at the same fateful hour. Before he mentions the Pleiades for the last time Lowry cites the constellation 'Orion'(337), itself possessing seven stars, whilst his references to ploughs throughout the novel may recall the constellation of the same name which too comprises seven stars: in Chapter One Laruelle is made to walk past 'An abandoned plough, silhouetted against the sky [which] rais[es] its arms to heaven in mute suplication'(15).<sup>6</sup>

By giving his novel twelve chapters, Lowry deliberately aligns its structure to that of classical epic, traditionally written in twelve books. Both Virgil's Aeneid and Milton's Paradise Lost comprise twelve books, whilst the Epic of Gilgamesh was inscribed on twelve tablets.<sup>7</sup> The reason why epics may have been given twelve books is because the number, as Isidore Kosminsky says, was, 'esteemed perfect and holy by the ancients, who named it "grace and perfection"'.<sup>8</sup> Lowry too was eager to see the number twelve become a vital component of his novel for, as the number of supreme order, it stands in antithesis to seven, the number of chaos - although, contextually, the Consul and Yvonne die 'chaotically' at the hour of seven, that mayhem becomes structurally eradicated by nature of it culminating the action of Lowry's twelve-chaptered epic. Just as Lowry riddles his text with famous

groups of seven which correspond to and strengthen his general employment of the digit itself, so he puts the same idea into practice, although on perhaps an even more lavish scale, with the number twelve, and alludes to a variety of 'twelve' groupings. G.P. Jones more or less reiterates Lowry's own words (in his letter to Cape) when he says that 'The final agonies of the Consul in Under the Volcano are carefully referenced into interlocking time-grids of twelve hours and twelve months',<sup>9</sup> yet such is indeed the case. Yvonne and Geoffrey are reunited for precisely twelve hours before being finally separated;<sup>10</sup> similarly, Jacques (and also Vigil and Bustamente) is left contemplating the tragedy twelve months to the day after its occurrence. The twelve hours which make up half a day, or the revolution of a clock face, and the twelve months which make up a year, or the revolution of the earth around the sun, both, therefore, inherently instigate twelve as the simultaneous start and finish of Lowry's 'infinite' cyclically-designed fiction.

Earlier in this study I suggested the possibility of a correlation for each of Under the Volcano's twelve chapters and the signs of the Zodiac: although such a hypothesis must remain essentially only speculative, it is perhaps worth making an attempt at locating some of the signs in that one of the novel's time-grids is that of twelve months, whilst Lowry also lists the constellations from which the sodiacal signs receive their names; moreover, an astrological framework is implicit in the novel's occult stance. It would seem apparent to directly relate Chapter Twelve to Scorpio for, in the Farolito, the Consul is compared to

the scorpion he sees on the wall which has stung itself to death as, in effect, he is about to do; moreover, his death takes place on the Day of the Dead, the 2nd of November, in Scorpio. Chapter Nine, at the Arena Tomalin, must be said to correspond to Taurus, for the bull is made the focal point of the chapter's action. Similarly, in Chapter Four, Hugh and Yvonne come across the equally 'central' animal, the goat, Capricorn; furthermore, they speculate upon the idea that the Consul is a black magician, thus 'wearing' the goat mask, whilst, in a sense, he is also being cuckolded and therefore again becomes a sort of goat. In that in Chapter Seven everything hangs in the balance (and we are, after all, at the book's centre), the Consul too hanging balanced in the Infernal Machine, we are perhaps also implicitly in Libra, the Scales: in the description of Jacques' house, with which the chapter commences, Lowry writes: 'upon corresponding merlons ... sat solemnly two nameless objects like marsipan cannonballs'(198), perhaps to be equated with weights equally proportioned on both sides of the balance'. In Chapter Eleven, as noted elsewhere, Hugh and Yvonne become inexorably linked as they pursue their lonely path through the forest and their, virtually inseparable connection, now at its culmination, may imply Gemini, the twins.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, in Chapter Six, the Firmin brothers become closely connected by nature of their maritime experiences and could thus be said to be symbolised by fishes, or Pisces - even towards the end of the chapter, when the sea yarns have been forgotten, Lowry renders Yvonne wearing a 'sharkskin suit'(190), and then, a couple of pages later, introduces a simile of time catching up with someone 'like a shark following a swimmer'(192).<sup>12</sup> The sign Virgo is represented by the planet Venus and in Chapter Two the planet is frequently mentioned and Yvonne

becomes designated as a Venusian love-goddess of sorts; moreover, the Consul has come to the Bella Vista from the shrine of the virgin. The remaining five signs and chapters of Lowry's novel would not, to me at least, appear to directly correlate: although Lowry mentions the Water-Carrier, the Crab, the Lion, the Ram and the Archer in various possible contexts, he does not seem to make any of them the dominant image of any respective remaining chapter. Thinking, at Laruelle's, nostalgically of his imaginary golf-course, the Consul conceives of someone searching for his ball: 'Who hunts my Zodiac Zone along the shore'(207); perhaps the complete zodiac zone of Lowry's Volcano too requires more passionate and dedicated hunting, whilst it may even be forever lost!

In positing the Consul as Christ figure, Lowry is also able analogously to draw the twelve apostles conveniently into both his mythic and numerological schemes at the same time: gaining information about the sanctuary in Tlaxcala in the guide-book which he locates in the Salon Ofelia lavatory, the Consul reads:

It was constructed on the colonial epoch. Its central altar is of an overloaded and embellished style. The most admirable is the vestry, arched, decorated with graceful carved works, prevailing the green, red and golden colours. In the highest part inside of the cúpula are carved the twelve apostles. (301)

Lowry compares Under the Volcano itself to a Mexican cathedral, whilst the book's style could be labelled 'overloaded and embellished'; in Lowry's 'church of fiction' the carved apostles may therefore be said to correspond to the twelve immaculately



chiselled chapters of his novel.

If one adds together the numbers seven and twelve one gets nineteen. Lowry too may have considered this simple arithmetical 'solution' for the number also features as an integral system within his fiction: on the first page proper of Under the Volcano we are told that the town of Quahnahuac lies 'on the nineteenth parallel'(9) and the number is used throughout the book to also draw the occasional 'parallel'.<sup>13</sup> Having described the situation of Quahnahuac globally, Lowry proceeds to detail some features of the town itself, for example, that it has a golf course: the Consul was once a keen golfer but at the time at which we encounter him could perhaps be described as more of a keen drinker and thus interested, not in the eighteen holes of a course, but rather, in the 'watering hole', the nineteenth, the club-house. In that the 'The Case is Altered', where Firmin attempts to begin his life of drinking, and the Parolito, where he certainly ends it, are situated adjacent to real and imaginary golf-courses respectively, they could both be termed nineteenth holes. Geoffrey's death takes place at seven o'clock but perhaps Lowry also suggests that it equally takes place at 'nineteen', for seven p.m. is represented by nineteen on a twenty-four hour clock: on the rail and bus timetable he encounters at the Salon Ofelia the Consul reads: 'Buses Flecha Roja. Leaving every hour from 5 to 19 hours'(303), and not only is Firmin's death implicated in the phrase, 'a corpse will be transported by express', but also, as he dies, Geoffrey imagines himself reaching the summit of the volcano in an ambulance, a sort of 'Flecha Roja' or Red Cross 'bus'. Earlier in the day, the Consul hears 'the echoes of gunfire over the house ... while somewhere a

clock was striking nineteen'(151), and immediately afterwards conceives of 'the dream of the dark magician'(151): Rozminsky writes that 'at number nineteen [the magician] enters the spiritual path and unites himself with God',<sup>14</sup> and, in a sense, Geoffrey achieves this reunification process through death.

Perhaps a final number of relevance to Lowry's scheme is '666', the number attributed to the beast in Revelations: 'Whoever is intelligent can work out the meaning of the number of the beast, because the number stands for a man's name. Its number is 666'.<sup>15</sup> In Under the Volcano the number appears by way of an advertisement which, like many other advertisements and signs, crops up everywhere; yet in Lowry's novel, as in the Bible, the number too could be said to stand for a man's name - the Consul's, in that he is overtly represented by the image of the Beast or Anti-Christ. As noted elsewhere, the Consul is given the archetypes of both Christ and Anti-Christ and when 'crucified' in the Infernal Machine the number strategically inverts to 999, the perfect or holy number. Both Christ and Anti-Christ are again virtually simultaneously reinvoked at the Farolito where the Consul asks the dwarf in the mingitorio the time and he replies 'half past sick by the cock'(353), the 'cock' recalling Peter's denial of Jesus; immediately after the dwarf has delivered his time check the Consul thinks '666'(353), thereby once again invoking the beast.

Lowry is forever obliquely seeking to draw attention to the numbers which riddle his text, attempting to establish patterns of association in his readers' minds. Vigil's consulting hours are given as '12 a 2 y 4 a 7'(29) - not only are twelve and seven vital

to Lowry's scheme but his novel also has four central protagonists<sup>16</sup> and is dominated by duality, 'two', in fact, being the book's very first word. Laruelle and the Consul had their childhood holiday in England together in the 'sweltering summer of 1911'(22); if we add the digits together we again get twelve; earlier on the same page as Lowry gives the date of their first encounter makes Jacques recall that he hadn't seen Geoffrey for 'a quarter of a century'(22) - twenty-five years ( $2+5=7$ ), and thus introduces his other vital digit.

The Consul lives at number 52 ( $5+2=7$ ); as they return to his house from the Hotel Bella Vista he and Yvonne pass the boxing advertisements, one boxer weighing in at '52 kilos', the other at '57 kilos' (57); a second or two before they had noticed that the boxing event takes place on the 8th of November with 4 contestants - again surreptitiously making twelve. In Chapter Seven a sentence commences with the words 'Dies Faustus' and ends with the Consul noticing that his watch says 'five to two'(223) - seven again, the time at which 'Faustus' is to die. Twice in the novel the Consul hears a clock strike nineteen, whilst, checking his watch once again at the fairground, Firmin sees that it reads 'seventeen minutes past two'(251) and immediately afterwards thinks he hears a ticking noise: time is ticking on towards nineteen hundred hours and his vendetta with death in the Farolito (the nineteenth hole) where the bell of the clock will toll his demise. A further ominous clock is sighted as the bus moves 'downhill' on its way to Tomalin: 'The clock over the market arch, like the one in Rupert Brooke, said ten to three' (235) -  $2:50(2+5+0=7)$ . Outside the Salon Ofelia Yvonne says that the scene reminds her of the 'Morseshoe Falls in Wales', to which the Consul replies: 'Or Niagara ... circa 1900'(287): circa 1900

(seven p.m.) when the horseshoe is literally to fall!

Sometimes Lowry half conceals his numbers from us leaving their inherently mystical significance to be divined or unearthed only after lengthy examination of his narrative. Nonetheless, one number at least is hardly 'concealed' in any way at all from us, and that number is two, the digit which appears more than any other in the course of the text. Whilst the numbers seven, twelve, nineteen, etc. eventually tend to become, what might be termed, autonomous, drawing attention to themselves, their mystical, sinister, ominous, structural roles merely 'accompanying' their every appearance, the number two fulfils a different function: it continuously underlines the various aspects of duality which inform the novel, openly announcing Lowry's continuously ambiguous or dialectical stance; moreover, it proclaims the text's obsession with the charting of pairs of identical experiences (see Mirrorings).

Lowry's patterns of association are perhaps nowhere more evident than in his numbers game, which he plays remorselessly with his readers throughout Under the Volcano. Christopher Butler, writing of Renaissance poetry, says that 'not only [was it] number-symbolic in content but also in structure'. We would expect that this numerological poetry would be proportioned and symmetrical and that the numbers taken for these proportions would themselves have a symbolic meaning which adds a further, allegorical level of meaning to the manifest content of the poem'.<sup>17</sup> Lowry himself emulates the Renaissance poet by making his number motifs relevant to aspects pertaining to both the content, as well as to the structure of his narrative. The range of implications his numbers possess become

infinitely enlarged because of their interconnected and symbiotic roles as constituent elements of the narrative's action, as well as its overall design. One might perhaps also add that, even though Lowry himself was a highly superstitious human being (which may explain the overt presence of number in his novel's content) and even though he was a highly fastidious organiser of his material (which may explain the overt presence of number in his novel's form), he was also something of a joker, and many of the tricks he plays in Under the Volcano, in terms of seeking to 'infinitely' develop the potential of his ordering systems, derive from his fascination with numerological play.

## NUMBERS - NOTES

1. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters (London, 1967), p.65.
2. - *ibid.*, p.77.
3. - It may be worth repeating that many of these connections can, if anything, only be 'sensed' in an initial reading of the text, yet they gradually accumulate or become more 'ordered' with subsequent re-readings. Once we know that Yvonne is trampled by the white horse with the number on it, we may look out for the digit on a further perusal of the narrative with the assistance of our hindsight or 'désja vu'. The gradual realisation, with each re-reading, that much, if not most of Lowry's material becomes aesthetically potent in terms of the text's overall design paradoxically makes Under the Volcano become both simpler as well as more complex.
4. - The chapters are themselves linked in innumerable ways, the most obvious perhaps being that Parian becomes sighted and alluded to from Jacques' towered dwelling which itself shares with the Farolito (lighthouse) the 'shape' of a tower yet the interior of which, like the cantina, seems labyrinthine.
5. - Geoffrey constantly confuses the number in his mind, sometimes rendering it as 34; other times as 43. (Perhaps Lowry wishes us to speculate that, although it can be turned round, neither its fateful 'sevenness' nor its structurally significant 'twelveness' can be avoided.)
6. - At the end of Chapter Eleven, Yvonne imagines herself being lifted heavenwards towards the stars, the seven stars of the various constellations and the seven 'heavenly' bodies thus cancelling out the doom which the number increasingly emanates in the novel's latter stages, although whether Yvonne is actually hoisted heavenwards remains, as suggested elsewhere, open to debate.
7. - Lowry could be said to obliquely allude to both the Aeneid and Paradise Lost in the Volcano: the former by nature of calling one of his characters 'Vigil', the latter, because one of the major themes of the novel is that of 'paradise lost'. Both epics, moreover, involute on themselves by beginning 'in media res', as Under the Volcano itself could be said to do.
8. - Isidore Kosminsky, Numbers: Their Meaning and Magic [1912] (London, 1975), p.34.
9. - G.P. Jones, 'Malcolm Lowry: Time and the Artist', The University of Toronto Quarterly, Vol.51, No.2 (Winter 1981/82), p.194.

10. - Geoffrey and Yvonne spend much less than twelve hours together, however; perhaps seven!
11. - It may be worth noting that had Hugh and Yvonne made the logical decision of going separate ways at the bisecting paths that the final double tragedy would have been averted.
12. - The 'concept' of time is alluded towards earlier in the chapter when Hugh remembers his encounter with Einstein. Lowry writes: 'the great Jew, who has upset the whole world's notions of time and space, once leaned down over the side of his hammock strung between Aries and the Circle of the Western Fish, to ask ... the time'(186) - Pisces precedes Aries in the zodiac.
13. - It may not be coincidental that the nineteenth letter of the Hebrew (and thus Cabbalistic) alphabet is 'Q', for people, places and things beginning with letter, like the number nineteen itself, curiously pervade Lowry's text: there is Quahnahuac, Quincey, the mysterious Quattras (whom Geoffrey remembers in his day-dream at the Salon Ofelia), the Q-ship (on which Geoffrey served), and the Qlipoth, in cabbalistic lore, the land of shells and demons (the word cabbala, moreover, can equally be spelt, Quabala).
14. - Isidore Kosminsky, Numbers: Their Meaning and Magic, p.43.
15. - Revelations, 13:18.  
  
In the same chapter of Revelations (in which its number is given it, the beast is also said to have been 'allowed to make proud claims which were insulting to God, and it was permitted to have authority for forty-two months'(ibid., 13:5), and in the Volcano the Consul is forty-two years old.
16. - Thinking of the Leasowe golf-course, Laruelle recalls how at week-ends the course was always packed with people 'playing foursomes'(23), the protagonists of the Volcano themselves unconsciously indulging in an analogous series of 'games'.
17. - Christopher Butler, Number Symbolism (London, 1970), p.102.

MIRRORINGS

Those long hours alone in the apartment, during which you stared at and animated all the things that surround us and touch us and become part of our lives at the same time that we become part of them, had given you your theme, a theme that in appearance had nothing to do with our illusory sadness, our petty bourgeois and idealistic sadness, but that by a kind of transmutation, a secret communication between mirroring surfaces that did not know how close together they were, had been born of the objects in the room.

Fuentes, A Change of Skin.

In her piece on the influence of Expressionism on his work, Sherrill Grace notes that Lowry employs 'many stylistic devices



common to Expressionism - telegraph style, framing devices, mirrors, clocks and staircases, whirling fairgrounds - that, along with double focus and visual effects, are especially obvious in Expressionist films';<sup>1</sup> later in her essay she suggests that in Expressionist films, as in Lowry's work, 'Mirrors, whirling fairgrounds, double and multiple exposures and chiaroscuro create the sensation of a landscape alive with menacing power'.<sup>2</sup> Whether or not Lowry extracted the devices of (literally) the mirror or (metaphorically) the mirroring from Expressionism is, I suppose, open to debate (I personally tend to think that Lowry drew much of his material from a dazzling variety of influences before both refining it and subsequently amplifying with it his own personal vision or aesthetic outlook); nevertheless, it is certainly a method which he employs remorselessly, in a variety of different and ingenious ways, to provide his text with yet another intricate internal system of order; a system of order, moreover, which does, in Grace's words, imbue his fiction with a 'menacing power', but which also constantly and implicitly seeks to draw attention towards the constituent form and balance operating throughout the narrative.

In his garden in the early morning, the Consul notices that the blue paint of his swimming pool 'had scarcely faded and [was] mirroring the sky, aping it'(72); a few pages later the clouds obscuring the base of the volcano Popocatepetl are rendered by means of the following simile: 'like smoke drawn across the mountain by several trains running parallel'(75). These two images may serve to underline something of aspects of Under the Volcano's own

structures for, not only is the occasional object itself mirrored, as in the case with the swimming pool and the sky, the novel's seemingly endless series of mirrorings is also revealed as profuse and multi-layered; that is to say many images become presented only for their multifarious parallels to run alongside them reflecting them, often at a much later stage of the narrative.<sup>3</sup> As such the reader of Under the Volcano, if he is to play Lowry's connections game with the fervour and dedication with which the author himself plays it, has to hold in his mind a plethora of (at first apparently meaningless or inconsequential) detail which he is later called upon to link with something that has gone before. (To achieve these processes of connection with any degree of success invariably requires the text to be re-read an almost indefinite number of times. In his letter to Cape, Lowry discusses the overlapping frames of images he uses in both Chapters Two and Eleven, employing a musical analogy by terming them 'chords, struck and resolved, [which] no reader can possibly apprehend ... on first or even fourth reading'.)<sup>4</sup>

Ten years in the writing and undergoing four major (and innumerable minor) revisions, Under the Volcano grew, much like Ulysses, from a rather undistinguished short story (the basis for the bus rider chapter) to become one of the most complex and ornate prose works of all time; its effects, indeed, perhaps achieved more in the 'poetic' than the prosaic vein, especially the poetic vein of the earlier part of the twentieth century; in fact of Modernism. D.W. Harding, paraphrasing some of Eliot's own criticism in order to discuss his poetry, asks the question about his work of 'how much we are educing from the [poem] itself

and how much we are reading into it a construction of our own',<sup>5</sup> a point which again serves to raise the 'thesis' of my introductory argument. Suffice to say (or repeat) here therefore that the complex series of mirrorings or parallels which emerge from close reading of Under the Volcano are, like much else, and perhaps even more so than much else, equally the possible domain of the reader himself. They could thus be said to constitute, to pick up my golfing metaphor once more, a series of well-struck putts which ensure that one's round on the golf-course of the text ultimately proves worthwhile.

The mirrorings in Under the Volcano become ends in themselves. Lowry uses them fundamentally to underline that he is creating a dense mosaic in which almost any character, event, action or phrase is likely to re-emerge, in similar (if not identical) fashion, again and again. Lowry, of course, explains the continual reappearance of many of his novel's threads and undercurrents by employing the analogy of the wheel: 'the symbol of Everlasting Return. That wheel, which demonstrates the very form of the book'.<sup>6</sup> The wheel could indeed be regarded as representative of the book's very form, especially if we think of the spokes as invisible connecting together the mirrorings which at first may appear only randomly dotted around the circumference (or the text's loosely 'spatial' organisation), but are in fact held in a more or less fixed position so that they come round again at an equi-distant space from where we first noticed them.

Essentially the novel's mirroring devices may be divided into two types: firstly, there are those connections which the

characters themselves observe; and secondly, there are those which only Lowry, as omniscient narrator, reveals for us. However, the issue is not as clear cut as each of the twelve chapters becomes 'told' through one of the four major characters' viewpoints (the Consul is given Chapters three, five, seven, ten and twelve; Yvonne, two nine and eleven; Hugh, four, six and eight; and Laruelle, one); as such, in a sense, the four alone, yet obviously 'together', provide us with all the mirrorings even though they may often be totally unaware of so doing, for example, in Chapter Ten when the Consul, during his train dream, asks himself: 'And who had flung the soiled bundle of tissue papers out of the window?' (285), he bathetically (and unconsciously) echoes Yvonne sailing into Acapulco harbour, the butterflies which greet her described in terms 'as though fountains of multicoloured stationery were being swept out of the saloon lounge' (48). On the other hand Lowry himself, as the novel's author, (although Firmin himself may be posited as its 'implied' author) is totally responsible for the connection. Lowry, fascinated by coincidence as he was, probably revelled in his characters' 'ability' to unconsciously echo and duplicate aspects or situations from the other protagonists' lives.

Each of the Volcano's four major characters are forever to be found in the process of connecting together various phases of their lives, and three of them (Yvonne, Hugh and Laruelle) are given extended flashbacks in which vital aspects of their pasts become revealed - 'vital' in that these incidents are often made, in a variety of different ways, to anticipate or pre-echo aspects of the situation confronting them on the Days of the Dead. The desire to find meaning and relevance, of any sort whatsoever, in a random

and chaotic universe is another pursuit in which the four engage (and which would again seem a trait drawn directly from Lowry's own highly superstitious personality) and all of them also have, what could be termed, fantasy worlds to fall back on: Laruelle lives in a cinematic world of make-believe dreaming of the epics he would one day like to shoot; Hugh conceives of a heroic pose amongst the vigilantes in Spain; Yvonne imagines an idyllic farm in the wilds of Canada; the Consul revels either in a secret hermetic world of Cabbala and Atlantis or in the philosophical stance of isolation and solitariness adopted by his Puritan hero William Blackstone. Of the four, the Consul's fantasies come the closest to being realised in that his alcoholism allows for his dreams to become played out in some sort of hallucinatory or visionary context which, for Firmin, equally becomes a reality.

Admittedly, within such a series of scenarios as described above, the characters tend to become stereotyped: they are often only simply assuming various poses, it seems, so that Lowry can cram his text with as many mirrorings as possible, for example, in Chapter Nine Yvonne seems to have to remember her visit to a cinema and the horse leaping out of the screen at her in order to parallel/anticipate the manner of her death; in Chapter One Laruelle seems to have to recall the Consul suggesting to him he make a film about some such character as Trotsky so that in the Farolito twelve Chapters later Firmin himself can become labelled a Trotsky and thus, in one sense, 'double' as the protagonist of his/Laruelle's imaginary film, etc. Lowry himself appropriately explains the apparent lack of 'character' in his novel in his letter to Cape:

The truth is that the character drawing is not only weak but virtually nonexistent, save with certain minor characters, the four main characters being intended, in one of the book's meanings, to be aspects of the same man, or of the human spirit, and two of them, Hugh and the Consul, more obviously are.<sup>7</sup>

Dale Edmonds, quoting an anonymous reviewer of Under the Volcano, writes 'that Lowry plays "with almost musical fascination on the unfolding variations to be evolved out of the groupings and regroupings of a single quartet of characters"'.<sup>8</sup> And, indeed, Lowry does often employ his mirroring device, on a very 'real' level, by demonstrating how, frequently, each of the 'four main characters' resembles somebody else, be it another member of the quartet, or a 'minor' character.

Thus the Consul becomes reflected, not only in his half-brother, but also in his childhood friend Laruelle, who is the same age as he, and who, 'in spite of his stoutness had an English, almost an ex-consular sort of litheness, about his movements'(213). (Interestingly, Firmin, asking himself 'why had Jacques come to Quahnahuac in the first place?' produces the enigmatic, para-normal answer that 'he, the Consul, from afar, had willed it, for obscure purposes of his own'(213,14).) Moreover, in the year which succeeds the Consul's death Laruelle apes his friend by also drinking ... heavily'(35).

As the Day of the Dead wears on, Hugh becomes inexorably linked with Yvonne (indeed he has already been linked to her, as has Laruelle, by having once been her lover.) they are both the same age (as are Jacques and the Consul); they ride together wearing

similar clothes - compare the, for the Consul at least, annoying 'crunch of [Yvonne's] heels on the road'(64)<sup>9</sup> and Hugh's own 'high-heeled boots'(99) - they walk around the fair together 'grinning at each other'(228), (as if, indeed, they were looking at themselves in a mirror); and just before his final exit from their company the Consul is forever linking them together: 'both Hugh and Yvonne seemed quite surprisingly tight'(304), he thinks, 'both your souls stink'(314), he says, and twice, just prior to leaving, shouts 'you two' (315) at them; moreover, he also implicitly connects them, and obliquely comments on the 'affair' he seems to think they are having, when he passes a comment that in India 'the widow of a childless man might contract a levirate marriage with her brother-in-law'(309).<sup>10</sup>

After the Consul's and Yvonne's deaths it is to Laruelle that Hugh turns, and in him that he finds his third 'mirror': on his last walk through the town of Quahnahuac, Jacques informs us that 'unassimilable catastrophe had drawn them together'(14), and that he had 'learned much about Hugh: his hopes, his fears, his self-deceptions, his despairs'(14); slightly later he thinks that 'he had acquired a certain identity with Hugh. Like Hugh he was going to Vera Cruz; and like Hugh too, he did not know if his ship would ever reach port'(15).

Geoffrey himself is also mirrored in Yvonne's reminiscences of her father. Not only does Yvonne at some stage think that the Consul's 'face for a moment seemed to have assumed that brooding expression of her father's'(260), but the two men also share a similar history: Yvonne's father too had been a 'young captain',

he too had allowed his plantation to run 'into weeds and ruin', and he too had ended up as 'American consul to Iquique'(260); moreover, Yvonne's father had 'invented a new kind of pipe'(261), whilst Geoffrey smokes a pipe, and also he had 'been implicated in the Dreyfus case'(268), whilst Firmin himself has been implicated in the Samaritan case. Similarly, Geoffrey shares some overlapping connections with his own father: he has an overwhelming desire to scale the volcano, whilst Firmin senior had disappeared without trace in the Himalayas; furthermore 'this latent desire to follow in his father's footsteps perhaps becomes demonstrated in the last couple of lines of the Consul's own unfinished poem:

Some tell  
Strange hellish tales of this poor foundered soul  
who once fled north ... (331)<sup>11</sup>

The Consul's mother is also soon introduced into the scenario: at the cantina El Bosque the Consul thinks, looking at Senora Gregorio, that 'he was looking at his own mother'(232); later, at Parian, the Consul 'sees' 'that the face of a reclining beggar was slowly changing to Senora Gregorio's, and now in turn to his mother's face'(342).

Nor do the 'doppelgänger' effects end there. (Grace notes 'the Expressionist predilection for self-portraiture and split-selves (doppelgängers)' going on to say that these devices are ways 'of projecting the image of the "I" as both self and other (e.g. cosmic or Faustian force)').<sup>12</sup> Lowry greatly enlarges the



scope of his hall of mirrors, as it were, by allowing the major protagonists to also become reflected in aspects of the novel's minor figures. The Consul especially can be favourably (or unfavourably) compared to a variety of other personae who appear, albeit briefly, along the route of his travels. The Consul thinks that the Chief of Gardens, for example, 'might have been the image of himself when lean, bronzed, serious, beard-less, and at the crossroads of his career, he had assumed the Vice-Consulship in Granada' (359).<sup>13</sup> (Later Lowry writes that Firmin 'saw himself the Chief of Gardens again and struck that figure' (372), an action which may suggest both Geoffrey's realisation that the Chief is somehow malevolent, as well as a self-realization of his own inadequacy.) Reminiscing about their past with his ex-wife in the early morning, the Consul asks Yvonne if she remembers how in Canada people 'kept mistaking [him] ... with [his] beard, for that wrestler' (93). Epstein notes that earlier, in Chapter Two, the reference to the wrestler on a bill-board: 'El Invincible Indio de Quahnahuac de 57 kilos, que acaba de llegar de la Capital de la Republica' (57) - 'The Invincible Indian of Quahnahuac weighing 57 kilos will fight for the championship title ... is another indirect reference to the Consul, who, born in India, is fighting to escape the abyss and, after twelve (5+7=12) hours dies inadvertently as a "champion" of the rights of man'.<sup>14</sup> As observed elsewhere, the Consul's name, Geoffrey, derives from the Anglo-Saxon and means 'God-given'; in Spanish the name Diosdado, as in the proprietor of the Farolito, also literally means god-given; indeed, Lowry refers to him by that title more than once. Not only is Diosdado to be found smoking the Consul's pipe, which Firmin had left there on a previous visit,<sup>15</sup> at one point he is also whimsically described by means of

the following simile: 'the Elephant [his nickname] appeared grim as if he'd just murdered another of his wives'(356), whilst, at the close of the narrative, the Consul too could be said to have, albeit unconsciously, 'murdered' Yvonne. The Consul has a goatee beard (thus making his symbolic identification with the goat more apparent) allowing him to be mirrored in the postman who, as Hugh notices, also has 'a tiny goatee beard'(195). In the main it is only the Consul himself to whom Lowry endows the ability to detect similarities in predicament, character or appearance; to observe, on an 'occult' plane, 'some correspondence between the subnormal world itself and the abnormally suspicious delirious one within him'(355).<sup>16</sup> Perhaps Lowry believes that the preponderance of such correspondences in the Consul's mind gradually accumulate throughout his final twelve hours to eventually demonstrate a madness or delirium verging almost, at the end, on schizophrenia: 'those features had tended to dissemble, to cloy and clutter, to become finally little better than ghastly caricatures of his dissimulating inner and outer self, or of his struggle, if struggle there were still'(362). Perhaps he means us to regard the Consul as a failed artist of sorts capable of noticing and observing aesthetic correspondences but ultimately being unable to do anything with them. Whatever, if any, Lowry's purpose is in employing his mirrorings to tell us something about Geoffrey's 'psychology' (in his letter to Cape - he dismisses the importance of character in his novel) the mirrorings which are made to emanate from the Consul greatly contribute to the patterns which the text is able to generate; they certainly appear to confirm, were it ever in doubt, in some kind of inexplicable, mystical, subconscious way (and in a manner which conveniently supports the book's generally occult

framework as well) that the Consul is the central figure of Under the Volcano and that many things, if not even in some strange way everything, 'revolve' around him.

Yvonne too does not escape being compared with someone else, for she apparently resembles the prostitute Maria: 'lightning silhouetted against the window a face, for a moment curiously like Yvonne's'; 'Her body was Yvonne's too'(349). The Consul detects in 'the Chief of Mostrum's expression a hint of M. Laruelle'(372). Laruelle is perhaps further implicated in a description of Yvonne's first husband: 'short-sighted and promiscuous, six foot three [Laruelle's height] of gristle and bristle and pathos, of deep-voiced charm and casuistry'(264). On the road to Tomalin, Hugh appears to half identify himself with the driver of the bus, whom he seems to resemble physically anyway:

The driver now came for a look, tall, in his white shirt sleeves, and soiled whipcord breeches like bellows, inside high-laced, dirty boots. With his bare tousled head, laughing dissipated intelligent face, shambling yet athletic gait, there was something lonely and likeable about this man whom Hugh had seen twice before walking by himself in the town. (246)

Not only has Hugh seen the driver twice, but we too shall see him twice for he reappears, as indeed do a host of other minor characters, at the Farolito; there, when the driver enters the bar, the Consul is rendered as having seen 'someone he recognized'(369) - perhaps Lowry intends us to recall the driver's identification with Hugh and thus, if only momentarily, think that Firmin believes it is his half-brother he has recognized. In the sense in which the driver

knows the Consul, having seen him earlier if at no other time, yet does not ultimately come to his assistance, he can perhaps be equated with Hugh's betrayal of his brother; rather, that is, with Geoffrey's belief that Hugh has somehow failed him.

Such character mirrorings, and I have only provided a selection of examples, enable Lowry to underline the innumerable connections, links, closed permutations which life offers; the life of the world of Under the Volcano at least, and which can subsequently become manipulated into a device which, when remorselessly employed, provides a rigorous ordering system throughout the novel. Although the central protagonists of Under the Volcano, especially the Consul himself, are made to become at least partially aware of the links and patterns which dominate their lives, or at least a few hours of their life, they appear to be far too busily engaged in the immediate hazards of day-to-day or, in their case, minute-to-minute existence to ever take a vast majority of the connections very far. Really, only Lowry himself holds the key to the homogenous and artificially inter-related world of his creation. Lowry pursues his God-like role as a creative consciousness in action when he also openly wraps his novel together in a wealth of corresponding imagery.

The beginning and end of Under the Volcano (the novel does not really even seem to begin until Hugh's arrival in Chapter Four; likewise, it appears to start to end, for the Consul's 'end' too becomes increasingly foreshadowed, perhaps from the word 'Downhill' (234) which begins Chapter Eight) are inexorably bound together, Lowry especially making various ingredients of Chapters One and

Twelve closely mirror each other. In his own chronological analysis of his novel to Cape, coming to Chapter Twelve, Lowry himself writes that it

is the easterly tower, Chapter 1 being the westerly, at each end of my churrigueresque Mexican cathedral, and all the gargoyles of the latter are repeated with interest in this. While the doleful bells of one echo the doleful bells of the other, just as the hopeless letters of Yvonne the Consul finally finds here answer the hopeless letter of the Consul M. Laruelle reads precisely a year later in Chapter 1. 17

Yet not only are the bells and the letters duplicated. Various other anticipatory elements, many relevant to the Consul's fate, are announced in Chapter One: the cinema mirrors the Farolito and the calender, the scorpion, the storm breaking out of season, the references to spies and Trotsky are all returned to, in one form or another, at the book's conclusion. Laruelle is made to cross the fateful barranca into which the Consul will fall; a sudden downpour descends on him as it does on the Consul as he frees the horse and is shot (Laruelle darts for cover from the rain yet Geoffrey is denied 'cover' from both the rain and the bullets); Jacques finds the letter which Geoffrey wrote in the Farolito and whole phrases from which become repeated verbatim by the Consul in the hour before his death, for example, the 'vulture sitting in the washbasin'. (41, 349-50).

Not only does Bustamante's cinema offer a venue to be compared to or mirrored in the Farolito at Parian, for Lowry connects his central protagonist's beginnings with his end too by manipulating

some of the features of the Leasowe of Jacques' 'remembrances of things past' into features which also become closely associated with the Consul's fate. (At the Farolito the Consul notices the innumerable little rooms in the place and thinks that 'He hadn't remembered before they were framed in dull glass'(344). In a sense, especially in the last hour of his existence, aspects of the whole of Firmin's life also could be said to be framed, and mirrored, in the dull glass which compartmentalises the Farolito's labyrinth.)

Yet not only do the descriptions in the first chapter of Under the Volcano (its prologue/epilogue) mirror elements of the novel's final chapter, for many of the actions and events of Chapter One deliberately foreshadow either the happenings or locales of all other future chapters too; and thus also, in that Chapter One of course takes place a year to the day after the other action, echo past time. This foreshadowing process (much earlier in this study I compared Lowry's first chapter to an operatic overture) is frequently made possible by the imposition of the peripheral persona of Laruelle and Vigil on both Days of the Dead described in the Volcano. One could say that Lowry's technique proves deliberately mystifying in the first chapter of his novel because many of the events described are not really fully comprehensible until we read the main narrative. Binns makes an appropriate and perceptive comparison when he writes of the Consul: 'As in a Conrad novel we first encounter him as a legendary figure long after the events of his tragedy have been concluded'.<sup>18</sup> Also, as at the beginning of many Conrad novels, there is an air of befuddlement, mystery and confusion apparent at the start of Under the Volcano: a sense,

perhaps, that we have been plunged into the action in 'media res'.

Vigil tells Laruelle of his visit to the Consul's house (which becomes chronicled in Chapter Five) and repeats to the Frenchman, virtually verbatim, the words he had spoken to Firmin a year earlier. To Laruelle:

Well, after I looked the Consul in his garden I send a boy down to see if he would come for a few minutes and knock my door, I would appreciate it to him, if not, please write me a note, if drinking had not killed him already. (10)

To the Consul:

I think even to send a boy after you this morning to knock your door, and find if drinking have not killed you already. (147) 19

Moreover, the doctor repeats to Laruelle not only his Spanish remark spoken to the Consul of his being 'perfectamente borracho' (11, 146), but he also repeats verbatim his maxim: 'Sickness is not only a body, but in that part used to be call: soul' (11, 148); in both conversations he also employs the strange word 'comport' (10, 146). Although, admittedly, Vigil's English vocabulary is limited, the almost identical nature of his twin conversations deliberately betrays the presence of a meticulous narrative organiser already imposing, on only the second page of the text, a plethora of material to be recapitulated upon and mirrored later.

Laruelle supplies further vital tentative information as to some of the actions performed by Hugh, Yvonne and the Consul a

year earlier. His remark: 'He was at my house when you telephoned, Arturo'(11) chronicles Vigil's telephone call to Jacques' tower, where once again Vigil's refrain of whether the Consul is 'not dead already'(209) becomes repeated. In the tower, not only does Geoffrey recapitulate to Laruelle on his visit to the Red Cross Ball with Vigil the previous evening, as well as the doctor's visit to his house some hours earlier, he also 'imagin[es] that weird gusty game of tennis under the hard Mexican sunlight, the tennis balls tossed in a sea of error'(210) which the Frenchman and the doctor are to have later in the day (Hugh actually spots them playing from the bus to Tomalin); and which mirrors the game of tennis the two 'have' or are about to play in the novel's opening pages. (On the day of the Dead, 1938, Laruelle and Vigil play tennis before Vigil 'goes on holiday'(210), whilst on the same date in 1939 their game takes place on the evening before Laruelle is to leave Quahnahuac.) As if these cross-textual connections and their variations were not in themselves sufficient to suggest (and reveal) the presence of a controlling consciousness, Lowry comments obliquely, by means of the Consul's thoughts on Vigil's brief though pertinent double appearance in the book, on the artistic autonomy of his mirroring device: 'and who was Vigil? - the good fellow seemed by now unreal to him as some figure one would forbear to greet for fear he was not your acquaintance of the morning, so much as the living double of the actor seen on the screen that afternoon'(21)). Using a favourite cinematic metaphor, Lowry does not conceal his novel's complex structure from us; rather, he deliberately reveals, by means of Firmin's own 'schizophrenic' thought processes, the presence of yet another hall of reflecting mirrors within his fiction.



The opening paragraphs of the second chapter of Under the Volcano, as partially noted, and annotated, elsewhere, afford Lowry yet another opportunity to recommence his narrative, and thus plant the seeds, as it were, for further mirrorings to once again flower later. Yvonne's arrival and her death, twelve hours later, become closely interwoven: the 'equestrian statue of the turbulent Huerta ... under the nutant trees'(49) becomes the actual horse which tramples Yvonne to death. In her dying vision Yvonne conceives of the horse in the following terms: 'the horse, rearing, poised over her, petrified in mid-air, a statue, somebody was sitting on the statue, it was Yvonne Griffaton, no, it was the statue of Huerta' (336).<sup>20</sup> The colour scarlet, in the shape of the 'scarlet brassiere' and 'scarlet bag'(51), is reinvoked, not only in the menacing 'red blaze'(317) of the storm-laden sky but also in the 'unnatural vividness' of a 'scarlet flower'(325,26). Moreover, the early morning sea scene, together with its 'beach' and 'boats'(50), reappears in the evening, together with 'beach' and 'boats' (336), to provide a cool contrast to the imagined house on fire, etc.

Throughout Under the Volcano, as noted above, we are forever meant to pick up 'odd' references, keep them in mind, and recall them when they are subsequently mirrored at a later stage. Perle Epstein writes of the novel's beginnings: 'Each symbol of importance ... even whole phrases, is reiterated throughout the remainder of the novel, until all are gathered together in full force during the intense climatic events of the last three chapters'.<sup>21</sup> Epstein's observation is pertinent and relevant to Lowry's technique, yet when she says that each symbol of importance is repeated at a later stage (and I agree with her) she is inherently 'considering'

a vast amount of material. A final example, drawn from the Consul's letter, will hopefully demonstrate a fraction of the density of Lowry's mirroring devices in action, for to hope to undertake a comprehensive account of the majority of his reflections or links would entail a somewhat mammoth exercise (in the course of this study in general I have, hopefully, drawn attention to some of the virtually infinite possibilities already); moreover, perhaps part of the satisfaction to be had in a location of the cross-references becomes gained, not in being told them, but in pursuing them for oneself; not in just watching the 'golf' but in participating too.

In his letter to Yvonne the Consul writes:

Once a year the dead live for one day. Oh come to me again as once in May. The Generalife Gardens and the Alhambra Gardens. And shadows of our fate at our meeting in Spain. The Hollywood bar in Granada. Why Hollywood? And the nunnery there: why Los Angeles? And in Malaga, the Pension México. And yet nothing can take the place of the unity we once knew and which Christ alone knows must still exist somewhere. (45)

It is to be remembered that the Consul writes this letter in the Farolito where we are to find him at the end of the novel; the reference to the dead living for one day is, of course, implicitly an allusion to the Day of the Dead itself (2nd November) on which the novel takes place. Chapter One occurs a year after the events of the other chapters, and thus when Laruelle reads the letter the Consul has been dead for exactly a year, nevertheless, in one sense, through the epistle's rediscovery he comes to 'live' again. The phrase 'Oh come to me again as once in May' pleads for Yvonne's

return and with the start of the following chapter she does return; the phrase itself becomes repeated to form the final sentence of Chapter Five.<sup>22</sup> Most of the remainder of the passage becomes mirrored in the Consul's mind at the Salon Ofelia, where 'Hollywood', 'Granada', 'Los Angeles', 'Alhambra', 'Pension' and 'Generalife Gardens' (293) all become reiterated; indeed, the 'shadows of ... fate' become, in Chapter Ten, much less 'shadowy' when we learn that Yvonne and the Consul had 'plighted their troth' at a 'Moorish tomb' (293). Yet Lowry has by no means <sup>used</sup> all the mirrorings from the six lines of the Consul's letter, for it is still to be used to relate to much more material which follows it: the garden plays a vital part in the symbolism of the novel and the police chief who gives the go-ahead for the Consul's murder is, of course, the Chief of Gardens; furthermore, the political situation in Spain is, at least in part, responsible for the Consul's death (Lowry mirrors Mexico and Spain still further when he places in Malaga a 'Pensión Mexico'). Mention of 'Hollywood' prepares us for the novel's cinematic aspect; of the 'bar' for the Consul's insatiable thirst for alcohol; and of 'Christ' for the numerous religious analogies. Ironically, in terms of the numerous meticulous intricacies of his novel's design, Lowry makes the Consul write: 'nothing can ever take the place of the unity we once knew' (45), for the text's mirrorings do take the place of that unity, replacing the chaos and confusion which often seems to dominate the protagonists' lives with an immaculate, cohesive system of order.

Christine Brooke-Rose writes that 'the first chapter ... is totally unnecessary',<sup>23</sup> which would seem to be a rather limited view to take in that, as hopefully demonstrated, the Volcano's

first chapter is crucial to the novel's meticulous balance, and totally necessary in conveying a mass of information re-utilized later in terms of Lowry's framework of interlocking structures. (Brooke-Rose also says that 'Laruelle is almost irrelevant and hardly appears in the novel proper',<sup>24</sup> a statement which again appears to be the product of a somewhat rash and superficial reading of the novel: although Laruelle is the least prominent of the four central protagonists, he is, nonetheless, a vital member of the quartet; ultimately he functions as a sort of 'chorus' by framing the action for us.)<sup>25</sup>

One of the reasons why Lowry makes his virtually infinite series of mirrorings become possible is that in Under the Volcano so many things happen twice: there are two Days of the Dead, two arrivals in Quahnahuac (Yvonne's and Hugh's), two deaths at the end of the story, most of the minor characters appear twice;<sup>26</sup> both brothers have been to sea, both Laruelle and Yvonne have worked in films, both Jacques and the Consul have had similar adolescent experiences, they are both the same age, as are Yvonne and Hugh. In my chapter on Numbers, I suggested the importance Lowry ascribes to certain digits, yet, as briefly mentioned there, the number two also plays a vital and dynamic role in Lowry's scheme (in fact it far 'outnumbers' any of the book's other digits). Just as the repetition of the numbers seven and twelve tends to produce a certain sub-conscious effect in the reader, drawing attention towards their structural or mystical significance, so Lowry's use of the number two may also serve obliquely to draw attention to the fact that many actions, events, things, phrases, words in the novel are, at some point, provided with a complement.

(As mentioned elsewhere this duality which informs Lowry's text is already present, to some extent, in the actual world of his setting, with its two mountain chains, twin volcanic peaks, centrally positioned two-towered dwellings, etc.)

Writing of the depiction of Dublin in Joyce's Ulysses, Hugh Kenner says: 'This is the city as labyrinth, the city as array of facing mirrors, the city defined by precisely related contours set in unsettling relations'.<sup>27</sup> Kenner, by referring to the city, also borrows Tony Tanner's term, 'city of words', and thus inherently suggests that Joyce's 'text' is labyrinthine, cross-textually 'mirrored'; and defined by precisely related contours. Under the Volcano too begins in a city yet its setting moves into the countryside, nonetheless, as city of words it undoubtedly shares with Ulysses the labyrinth, the 'mirrorings' and the contours set in unsettling relations which Kenner notes as features of Joyce's work.

MIRRORINGS - NOTES

1. - Sherrill E. Grace, 'Malcolm Lowry and the Expressionist Vision', in The Art of Malcolm Lowry, edited by Anne Smith (London, 1978), p.100.
2. - *ibid.*, p.105.
3. - In point of fact the image of the steam train Lowry uses to describe the clouds surrounding the volcano is already mirroring a description of a train in the Consul's unsent letter, a 'many-engined freight train ... rolling eastward ... under a sky clear save where far to the north-east over distant mountains whose purple has faded, lies a mass of almost pure white clouds'(42,43); moreover, both of these train, steam, cloud descriptions are themselves to be mirrored in the Consul's train dream with which Lowry commences Chapter Ten: 'And now, one after one, the terrible trains appeared on top of the raised horizon, shimmering now in mirage; first the distant wail, then, the frightful spouting and spindling of black smoke'(284).
4. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters. (London, 1967), p.84.
5. - D.W. Harding, Experience into Words: Essays on Poetry (Cambridge, 1982), p.169.
6. - Malcolm Lowry, 'Preface to a Novel', trans. George Woodcock, Canadian Literature, No.9 (Summer, 1961), p.12.
7. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.60.
8. - Dale Edmonds, 'Under the Volcano: A Reading of the "Immediate level"', Tulane Studies in English, No.XVI, 1968), p.67.

Edmonds' anonymous reviewer's remarks appear in 'A Prose Wasteland', The Times Literary Supplement, (May 11, 1962), p.338.

9. - The use of the word 'heel' provides something of a varied motif of sorts throughout the text: in Chapter Two the voice of Weber says 'We come through with heels flying' (51); later in the chapter, after Yvonne's heels have been described, the Consul 'obliviously describes Hugh and Weber (who came over the border together), not knowing that Weber had in fact been present in the Bella Vista, in the following terms: "Anyhow he [Hugh] got as far as Chihuahua with the cattle, and some gun-running gun-toting pal by the name of - Weber? - I forget, anyway, I didn't meet him, flew him the rest of the way." The Consul knocked out his pipe on his heel [*my italics*], smiling.

"It seems everyone comes flying [my italics] to see me these days." (65); in Chapter Three, the Consul is aware of a pariah dog 'appear[ing] familiarly at heel' (70); in Chapter Four, Hugh tells Yvonne that his newspaper told him to leave Spain, and says 'And like a heel I went' (106); in Chapter Six, the 'heels of [Yvonne's] red shoes [are again recorded] clicking laconically on the broken stones' (191); at the cantina El Bosque the Consul asks himself: 'how many wolves do we feel on our heels' (232); on the road to Tomalin, after glimpsing the dying Indian, Yvonne gives 'a nervous cry and turn[s] on her heel' (244); in the arena, the bull is made to suffer 'a smart little dog snapping at his heels' (257); later in the chapter Yvonne remembers a photograph of herself in which she was 'dressed in fringed leather shirts and riding-breeches and high-heeled boots' (266) (and again, in this context, her apparel is directly mirroring Hugh's earlier described cowboy outfit); a few pages on, she recalls the 'chords of Bolero... snapping and clicking their heels' (269); when Hugh rides the bull the little dog is again described 'barking at [the animal's] heels' (279); in Chapter Twelve, Weber repeats his line about coming 'through with heels flying' (364).

10. - India and Mexico are themselves neatly mirrored again at this juncture when the Consul's inquisitive and obscure mind claims to see the following 'relation, apart from any purely verbal one, between Taxila and Tlaxcala itself: for when that great pupil of Aristotle's ... Alexander, arrived in Taxila, had he not Cortez-like already been in communication with Ambhi, Taxila's king, who likewise had seen in an alliance with a foreign conqueror, an excellent chance of undoing a rival, in this case not Moctezuma but the Paurave monarch, who ruled the country between the Jhelma and the Chenab' (309).
11. - The Consul's and his father's deaths are further linked by means of two local Christ myths: in Chapter Ten, the Consul says that Jesus 'after being taken down from the cross, wandered to Kashmir in search of the lost tribes of Israel, and died there, in Srinagar' (309), and the Consul's father too dies in the Himalayas after 'leaving Geoffrey, at Srinagar, with his half-brother' (25), whilst in Chapter One, Laruelle says that the barranca, in which the Consul, of course, is cast, is a product of 'when Christ was being crucified [for], so ran the sea-borne, hieratic legend, the earth had opened all through [the] country' (21).
12. - Sherril E. Grace, 'Malcolm Lowry and the Expressionist Vision', in The Art of Malcolm Lowry, p.98.

13. - Firmin thinks the Chief could have been himself 'at the crossroads' of his career, whilst in the Farolito in the hour before his death, Geoffrey finds himself at another vital crossroads (as he did literally when he chose the direct path to Parian). In another sense, the Chief of Gardens could be said to preside over the Consul's crucifixion.
14. - Perle S. Epstein, The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry: Under the Volcano and the Cabbala (New York, 1969), p.80.
15. - When, in the Farolito, the Consul recalls a 'barman [whose] name [is] Sherlock' (345), he implicitly makes a connection between the pipe-smoking detective and both himself and Diosdado. If we recall that Yvonne's father invented a type of pipe, and subsequently realise the pipe-smoking and other links between Geoffrey and the Elephant, then we could perhaps also be said to become a kind of detective or 'Sherlock'.
16. - The appearance of these phrases in the Farolito in Chapter Twelve echoes Laruelle's recollections in Chapter One: 'some correspondence, maybe, as Geoff liked to put it, between the subnormal world and the abnormally suspicious' (40). Laruelle remembers these words just prior to discovering the Consul's unsent letter which itself could be said to constitute a 'correspondence' between the subnormal world (death?) and the abnormally suspicious world of Laruelle's obsession with his dead friend.
17. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters, p.85.
18. - Ronald Binns, 'Materialism and Magic in Under the Volcano', Critical Quarterly, Vol.23, No.1, Manchester Univ. Press (Spring, 1981), pp.21-22.
19. - Although the words and phrases used in these two conversations are virtually identical, there is, of course, also a rather large discrepancy between them. To the Consul Vigil had said that he thought of sending a boy down to enquire about the Consul's condition, whilst he informs Laruelle that he did send a boy down; in fact, in the course of the narrative proper, no such boy appears.
20. - After the phrase: 'it was the statue of Huerta' the sentence continues, 'the drunkard, the murderer, it was the Consul, or it was a mechanical horse on the merry-go-round, the carrousel, but the carrousel had stopped and she was in a ravine down which a million horses were thundering towards her, and she must escape through the friendly forest to their house, their little home by the sea' (336). Virtually every noun employed in the above passage serves to continue, although, in a way, also summarise, a host of themes and 'ordering systems' maintained and alluded to constantly throughout the text (many relating to major sections of this thesis).



21. - Perle S. Epstein, The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry: Under the Volcano and the Cabbala (New York, 1969), p.60.
22. - At the end of Under the Volcano's fifth chapter, the Consul has the sensation of a noise 'as from the persistent rolling of drums heard by some great dying monarch [with only] occasionally a half-recognizable voice dissociat[ing] itself'(153). The six 'voices' which follow prove 'half-recognizable' because again they employ words (clues) from the rest of the text which make them identifiable, for example, the broken English reveals the voice of Vigil, whilst the sentence 'straightened out - in a coffin'(153) recalls Quincey's earlier cynical comment that Geoffrey is on the 'funeral wagon'(137), etc.
23. - Christine Brooke-Rose, 'Mescalusions', London Magazine, 7, No.1 (April, 1967), p.102.
24. - ibid., p 102.
25. - As possible implied 'director' of the action of the Day of the Dead, 1938, Laruelle could also be said to 'frame' the events in another way.
26. - There is also a death in the middle of the story - the Indian's - to which the deaths at the end yearn to be compared.
27. - Hugh Kenner, 'James Joyce and his Civilisation: Notes Towards an Anatomy of Modernism; in A Starchamber Quiry: A James Joyce Centennial Volume, 1882-1982, edited E.L. Epstein (New York and London, 1982)p.36.

CONCLUSION

I speak of the passion for order ...

Lowry, Selected Letters.

My study has attempted to demonstrate some of the systems  
of order which pervade Malcolm Lowry's novel Under the Volcano.  
I hope that I have been able to draw attention to the density and

multi-layered nature of the text, although if this generally desired effect has been in any way achieved it has been done through example only. That the novel certainly is dense and multi-layered might seem beyond dispute; nevertheless, one might like to argue that the innumerable various threads which this thesis has located, ultimately, do not really clarify the text for us; rather, perhaps, that they have the combined effect of increasingly entangling us in the labyrinth, so to speak, as opposed to leading us out of it; that really, in effect, the enumerated systems of order amount to little more than systems of chaos or confusion. In the conclusion to his study of Under the Volcano, Doross writes that in the introduction to his work he had

suggested that Under the Volcano [was] an imaginative universe capable of revealing 'ever new meanings'. [However, he goes on to say] Having now considered the novel in detail, it seems that the 'ever new meanings' bring at times this universe to the point of dissolution. Presumably the burden of controlling his creatio continuum was too heavy for Lowry ...<sup>1</sup>

I would like to suggest it is Doross's reading of the novel which is at fault; that for him, not Lowry, the burden of controlling the text has become too much; the reason for this state of affairs being that Lowry deliberately invites final control from his reader (although, as hopefully suggested elsewhere, Lowry more than pushes his readers into a viably correct area in which their individual contributions to the text become possible). In my own Introduction I suggested that Under the Volcano could be regarded, for my convenience anyway, as a sort of golf-course across which each specific reader, to some extent, engages in his own game of the

imagination, and, unlike Dorosz, my own position has not changed after the completion of my study.<sup>2</sup> In his letter to Cape, Lowry says that with his novel much depends 'upon [the] reader's state of mind and how prepared he is to grapple with the form of the book and the author's true intention'.<sup>3</sup>

Within his letter to Cape at least, Lowry does not appear to directly express what his true intention is in writing the Volcano; nevertheless, he certainly provides many hints as to what it might be, in that he forever seeks to draw his 'reader's' attention (by reader I mean the reader of his letter, not of his novel) towards various systems of order with which his book are imbued. At the beginning of this study, in its Introduction, I suggested that Under the Volcano was a sort of game. Throughout my 'reading' of the novel, I have often had cause to point out the gamesmanship which Lowry exhibits in presenting his material to us. He invites the reader to join him in a pursuit of form, of the artifice, and this could be said to be the author's true intention.

Lowry himself demonstrates the redundancy of an overtly didactic approach to his novel by allowing as many of its symbolic elements as possible to conflict, and thus cancel themselves out, showing, therefore, that he himself supports no single perspective. This cancelling out of separate unities could be regarded, in a sense, as synonymous with the eradication of the book's 'content', and thus brings with it a deliberate foregrounding of the novelist's technique. Increasingly, one becomes aware (or is made aware) of the book's cadences; of its musicality; of its striving towards pure form.

Lowry writes: 'One serious intention was to create a work of art - after a while it began to make a noise like music; when it made the wrong noise I altered it - when it seemed to make the right one finally, I kept it'.<sup>4</sup> As a sort of 'music', Lowry's Volcano implicitly shares with many modernist texts, Finnegans Wake perhaps being the most extreme example, the desire to be mentally patterned, manipulated, played around with, but never 'understood': the systems of order themselves become more important, as 'systems', 'per se' than what they are meant to be ordering - myths, symbols, motifs, ~~appearing~~ appearing in similar, if not identical fashion, at various stages deliberately reveal the artificiality of the narrative voice behind their steady and regular appearances - eventually, we no longer become interested in what they say, or what they 'mean'; rather, our attention becomes drawn to the question of when and where we have encountered them before. Again, as systems of order, rather than ordering systems, do they achieve pre-eminence.

A good set of clubs is required to play around at this level on Lowry's course - the mythic wood, the symbolic iron, the motival wedge: even then anybody can still be liable, through lack or lapse of concentration, to a poor shot. In my Introduction, I asked the question of whether it was possible to achieve the maximum number of imaginative connections in the least number of shots; whether or not any respective pattern was capable of being minimally isolated'. If anything, my attitude to proficiency on the course of Under the Volcano has changed: although it may be more frustrating to mis-hit and lose one's ball in the pursuit of systems of order, ultimately, on the Lowryian course (as on any course), it

is getting there in the end which counts; and who knows the longer route may even have revealed some more interesting terrain in the process. In Under the Volcano, as on a golf-course, if one takes E.M. Forster's advice and at least forever attempts to 'Only connect' then one is already trying to play the game.

CONCLUSION - NOTES

1. - Kristofer Doross, Malcolm Lowry's Infernal Paradise (Uppsala, 1976), p.154.
2. - The reason why Doross finds Lowry's universe verging on the point of dissolution is perhaps precisely because the possibilities of the text eradicate the validity of his mono-dimensional approach towards it.
3. - Malcolm Lowry, Selected Letters (London, 1967), p.58.
4. - *ibid.*, p.200.
5. - E.M. Forster, epigraph to Howards End (Harmondsworth, 1972), p.3.

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EDITED INTERVIEW BY THE AUTHOR WITH MARGERIE LOWRY,  
CONDUCTED ON THE 3rd SEPTEMBER, 1979.

Interviewer: I'd like to begin by asking you some questions about the writers your husband was reading at the time of Under the Volcano's composition. Do you think you could provide me with a few names?

Mrs. Lowry: He always had the same three or four books by his bedside. These were: the Bible, William James' Varieties of Religious Experience, the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins and A Vision by Yeats, and he would always be dipping into them. I think he knew Melville by heart; he had all of Melville. Then he read some D.H. Lawrence, we both did: Kangaroo, Mornings in Mexico, The Plumed Serpent, but he didn't really like that. Then ... let me see, there was Proust; he read all those. Sometimes he read some Greek plays. He liked Wuthering Heights. Some of the inspiration for the Volcano came from some writers on the occult and the cabbala. He read Ouspensky and was influenced by J.W. Donne's Theory of Time.

Interviewer: Was the sea metaphor, for example, directly inspired by the writings of Melville or Conrad?

Mrs. Lowry: Melville, I think, yes definitely. And Nordahl Grieg. He went to Norway to meet Grieg. He used to say that the sea meant everything to him; was personal, was part of him. But I think Grieg's book was almost a part of him too ...

Interviewer: The Ship Sails On?



Mrs. Lowry: Yes. He wanted to make it into a play. We did Moby-Dick as a radio play, but Malc wasn't happy with it.

Interviewer: Do you think one of his intentions was to build a kind of 'sub-structure' of other literary texts into Under the Volcano?

Mrs. Lowry: Oh, yes, definitely. He worked at that a lot. He once said that it didn't matter if each reference to other literature wasn't understood for the book would echo in the sub-conscious of Western man.

Interviewer: How would he go about assimilating these other works into Under the Volcano? Would he, for example, read a passage of Dante and then immediately work it into his own drafts?

Mrs. Lowry: He was always dipping into Dante. He would sometimes read bits out to me. Most of what he put into the Volcano was probably in his memory all along. I think he did an assignment on Dante whilst he was at Cambridge. He had quite a phenomenal memory. He could quote Greek tragedies, Shakespeare, Dante at the drop of a hat. I always thought that he didn't live on the same level as most of us do because his mind was so quick.

Interviewer: When Under the Volcano was compared to Joyce's Ulysses, Mr. Lowry was eager to state that he had never read Ulysses? What would his reaction have been if his book had been compared to Moby-Dick or Dante?

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Mrs. Lowry: He was flattered by the Volcano being compared to Joyce. He read some of Ulysses I think, but then he got bored with it. Conrad Aiken liked Joyce and borrowed some of his style for the Blue Voyage which Malc knew at the time of Ultramarine. Aiken and Nordahl Grieg were the main influences on his early writing. He once said he wished he had the poetic quality of Aiken and the simplicity of Grieg, but he said it half in jest anyway.

Interviewer: What I'm perhaps trying to get at is that it would seem something of a contradiction to make a claim for total originality in a book which contains so many allusions and references to other texts.

Mrs. Lowry: Malc was upset at the Volcano being compared to The Lost Weekend. He considered the Volcano to be totally original and said that every quotation meant something; that the book had a sort of relationship to everything else, but that it was his own book at the end ...

Interviewer: To just pursue the question of borrowings and allusions one step further; were the 'thriller' aspects of the book taken from somewhere - I'm thinking of the 'spies', money carrier, fascist police shoot-outs, etc. - say from B. Traven, Graham Green, Ambrose Bierce or Conrad? Or perhaps there was an influence in this direction from films of the time?

Mrs. Lowry: I think only the surface of Under the Volcano is like a thriller. I think you want to know what will happen next, and I think Malc wrote it like that to keep you 'hooked', as they say.

Malcolm was influenced by all sorts of things: books, plays, films. We had lots of books in the house but we'd still go to the library in Vancouver and to the films. I suppose something of what you call the 'thriller' might have come from films. I don't know.

Interviewer: I know that you yourself wrote a couple of detective or mystery stories at the time. Did you directly assist in that aspect of the Volcano in any way?

Mrs. Lowry: Malcolm always wrote in longhand; then I would type what he'd done and then there'd be a conference. He said he'd never publish anything I didn't approve of. I gave him some things on how Yvonne should be dressed, what I thought; things like that. The whole horse and rider and the saddlebags and the number seven business came out after many conferences. One day Malc said: 'What am I going to do with this b!essed horse? I've brought it in; how am I going to get it out?', and I said to him: 'Why not let it kill Yvonne', and he thought this was a marvellous idea and liked it straightaway...

Interviewer: So to have the horse kill Yvonne was, in fact, your idea?

Mrs. Lowry: It was, yes. But Malc would have thought of it himself. We tended to think in the same way. You see it fitted into that idea of Hugh conquering the bull and Yvonne mastering the horse but the Consul releasing the animal and bringing about destruction.

Interviewer: Were the two of you aware of the melodramatic nature of the novel's plot, which has, I think, been unfairly criticised?

Mrs. Lowry: I don't really think we thought of it as melodramatic, Malc certainly didn't. I mean lots of the things actually happened. When Yvonne thinks of her house burning, that came in after our own home burnt down. The postcard that Laruelle finds under the pillow at the time he hears of the Consul's death ... I think Malc considered those sort of things as a sort of tragic coincidence, not melodrama.

Interviewer: When the idea of Yvonne having to die too came in the book had been in the process of being written for some years already ...

Mrs. Lowry: Yes.

Interviewer: I'm thinking that there are lots of references to a double death throughout the book, anticipations: were these all put in afterwards?

Mrs. Lowry: Well yes, probably. You know there wasn't a day when Malcolm would not write. He had lots of pieces of paper, hundreds, thousands of typed sheets. He might write a sentence ten or fifteen times and then he might re-write it another ten or fifteen times. Then he'd leave it and at some later time go back to it again and revise it again. A lot of the book was always being rewritten all the time; always changing.

Interviewer: How important was the whole cabbala business to Mr. Lowry? Did he use the occult, numerology, the Tarot, etc. as a means of providing his book with yet further types of ready-made ordering systems which he could sort of tune in to?

Mrs. Lowry: In the early days of the book, when Yvonne was the Consul's daughter, Malcolm said, 'I think the Consul is a black magician' and then he wrote in a few things about that time on alchemy and Atlantis and a few other things. Then one day this tall, dark, cadaverous looking man appeared. He was taking a census; he and Malc got talking and it turned out that he was a Cabbalist. We became friends and he would then often come to the house and talk about the Tree of Life and the Tarot, things like that. Anyway he gave Malcolm some books ...

Interviewer: Sorry, this was Charles Stansfeld-Jones, was it?

Mrs. Lowry: Yes, that's right. He gave Malc a few things, pamphlets. Malcolm had some Tarot cards. I think in the Volcano he uses the Tree of Life and the Cabbala ...

Interviewer: Did Mr. Lowry become a cabbalist himself?

Mrs. Lowry: No, not really. He just used it. He said it was so poetic and so symbolical.

Interviewer: Do you think that the whole magic side of Under the Volcano has been overplayed or over-exaggerated? I'm thinking especially of that book, The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry.

Mrs. Lowry: Well, I think it's difficult to say, I mean I think it has been exaggerated. I mean that book exaggerates it. The Cabbala is there in the Volcano so I suppose you can make of it what you want really. Malc really just used it I think as another kind of symbolism.

Interviewer: What about the numbers?

Mrs. Lowry: Oh, they're there alright - seven and twelve. I suppose you know all about that. Seven was a mystical number for Malc. It seemed to haunt him.

Interviewer: Did these numbers come from his reading about the Cabbala?

Mrs. Lowry: Yes, to some extent; that field anyway. Yeats: A Vision. He used to read that out aloud. The wheel as well has some connections with the occult and the Tarot.

Interviewer: Having read the novel a few times, I find myself still constantly surprised by the number of things crammed into it - references to places in the world, numbers, colours, other books, myths, etc. Was any specific system used to try and get as much as possible in?

Mrs. Lowry: Sometimes Malc had lists of things he wanted to put in. He wanted to get as much thickness into the book as he could. But then he had a remarkable memory as well. And I think his style is so colourful and evocative but then he worked a lot too on

getting it like that.

Interviewer: Would you say that he had to work hard to achieve what he did in the Volcano?

Mrs. Lowry: Most definitely, yes. But then it wasn't really work for him. You see he lived the book; it was part of him. It was his life really that he was writing about, and I don't just mean his life in the sense of the time he spent in Mexico, I mean all aspects of his being, and of what we shared as well, were put into it. When it was going well Malc used to say: 'It's writing itself today.'

Interviewer: Mrs. Lowry, thank-you.

Mrs. Lowry: I hope I've been able to be of some help.

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